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The prophets

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The Prophets
Elijah to Christ

The Prophets

Elijah to Christ

By
ANDREW W. BLACKWOOD

Illustrated by Original Charts

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To
Montreat
in the land of the sky
with visions
of
rest for the weary
truth for the righteous
power for the faint
and
blessing for all
who seek the glory of God

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Foreword

THESE studies on representative prophets of Judah and Israel aim to be popular and suggestive, rather than technical and exhaustive. They have been given at the Montreat Bible Conference, and at similar assemblies, as well as in various congregations, notably in that which I now serve as pastor. Again and again I have been asked to name at least one book giving a spiritual presentation of the prophets from the conservative point of view, and adapted to the needs of the Christian business man or house mother, as well as of our young folk in school and college. When I have frankly confessed that so far as I know such a book remains to be written, some of my friends have kindly suggested that I prepare these studies for the press. Those who know how the new friends in the South have opened their hearts to me will understand why their wish has become my law. Should we not think of the prophets, too, as our friends?

These studies point out an attractive route over which the busy pastor may lead his congregation, and by which the thoughtful layman, with no special preparation for the task,

and with only a few minutes each day for quiet thinking, may hope in time to make his way through this large portion of the Biblical world. Owing to the vast areas of thought and of life to be traversed, the teacher can hope merely to suggest a perspective and a starting point for each study, as well as a path of approach, and then leave the thoughtful student to complete the survey. The aim throughout must be, not to raise critical questions, still less to solve them, but to show the heart and the life of each man, largely from a single point of view, and to sound forth at least a portion of his message to the modern world.

In quest of truth and light on these prophets I have gone to many books, and the best of them have sent me back ere long to the Bible. For counsel and encouragement I have looked to a few friends, and especially to three: Walter L. Lingle, D. D., presiding genius at Montreat; Wm. M. McPheeters, D. D., professor of Hebrew in the Columbia Theological Seminary; and George A. Wauchope, Ph. D., professor of English in the University of South Carolina. Each of these in his own way has let the courtesy of a friend shine through the discrimination of a scholar. "Other men have laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

A. W. B.

Columbia, S. C.

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I

THE PROPHETS: MEN GREATER THAN KINGS

THE tourist who goes to Boston in quest of works of art soon finds his way to the Public Library, and among all its treasures he discovers nothing more interesting and helpful than Sargent's paintings of the Old Testament prophets. Sargent was an artist rather than an interpreter of Scripture; his creations are more worthy of note for their individuality than for their likeness to these men of the Bible; and so the tourist who brings away with him from Boston a vision of this work of art, as well as a copy to hang in his home, should turn to his Bible to learn how well the artist has reproduced the majesty of Isaiah and the sweetness of Hosea, but how dismally he has failed to show the strength of Amos and the tenderness of Jeremiah.

These men of old should appeal to all of us who are interested in personality. Nowhere in all history and literature, not even in the Bible, can we find a body of men who for character

and attainment surpass these prophets of Judah and Israel. Where, for example, in all the history of these two nations can we find four kings, to whom the world is so much indebted as to the four prophets mentioned above? Where among all the priests? And even among the apostles, as portrayed in "The Last Supper," which four should we select? If we scan our own age, with all its boasted progress, we shall look in vain for four such giants of thought and action. These comparisons are hazardous, for we cannot weigh men as we weigh cattle; but only when we set the prophets over against other men of might, do we begin to value the "force of their inspired personality."

Many of us who know a little about the greater kings of Judah and Israel know almost nothing about the prophets who were responsible for much that was good in the work of those kings. In our study of American history in the public schools we have paid more heed to the hero of war than to the hero of peace, and in our hasty excursions through the Bible in the Sabbath school we have given more thought to the puppet on the throne than to the ambassador from the court of God. We must not disparage the kings, for some of them

were true and strong, but if we are to understand how far short many of them fell from their divine ideal, we must become acquainted with the prophets.

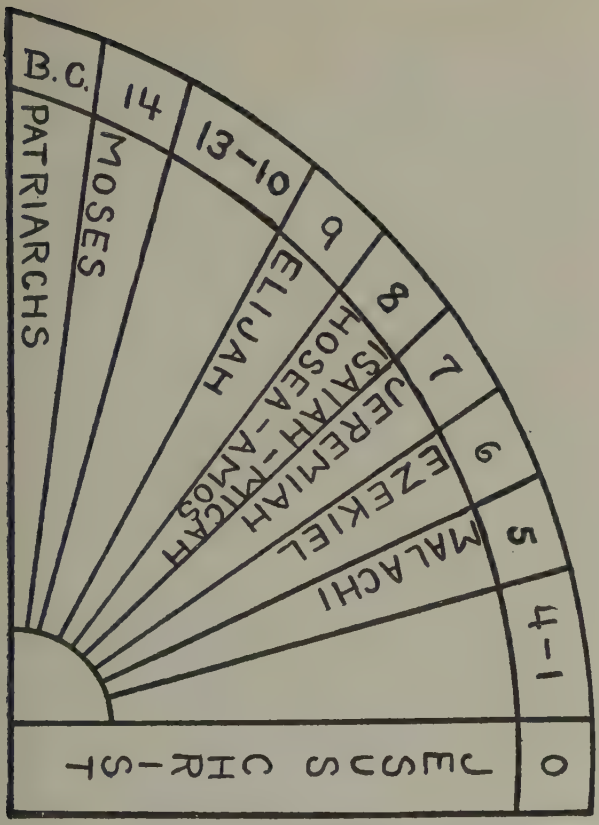
Think, for example, of Samuel and Saul, of David and Nathan, of Ahab and Elijah, of Jehoram and Elisha, of Jeroboam II over against Amos and Hosea, of Uzziah and his successors over against Isaiah, of Josiah and Jeremiah, of Jehoiachin and Ezekiel; not to speak of Daniel, of Haggai, of Zechariah, and of the many others down to Malachi, who spoke for God after the kings had ceased to reign. We often say with truth that no man is educated unless he knows the Scriptures; we should add that no man knows the Scriptures unless he knows the prophets, and yet many of us are intrusting the religious education of our children to pious young persons who have a smattering of the external facts about the kings, but who have scarcely so much as heard that there were such men as the prophets.

For such ignorance of the prophets we ministers are to blame. If our people are to value these men who upheld the hands of the kings that were true, and who thundered doom against those that were false, we must lead the way. In the Sabbath school we must some-

how teach our young folk to read their Bible so that they will not breathe a sigh of relief when they have finished the Minor Prophets. In our preaching, instead of turning to the prophets only when we wish a striking text, to be snatched out of its setting because it sounds well, and to be applied in an arbitrary fashion which must grieve the Holy Spirit, we ought rather to lead our people in time into an intelligent appreciation of the outstanding seers and of their message to the modern age. We must know the truth ere it can make us free. "He that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the Word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit."

I. A Bird's-Eye View

When Sargent gathered these prophets together in a single group, he took full advantage of his license as an artist, for in life these men formed a succession extending over long centuries. It would be interesting to study the Old Testament for a time with the one purpose of discovering, so far as possible, how large these men loomed in every age. We should find that almost every outstanding leader of God's people, such as Noah or Abraham, was a prophet, in the larger sense of that word; and



(*Adapted from Dr. W. W. White.*)

THE PROPHETIC SUCCESSION.

that the entire Old Testament was written by these men of God. But in the present studies, for sake of clearness, we shall think only of the leading prophets from the days of Elijah to the days of Malachi.

In the earlier days of Judah and Israel, the power of these men of God gradually waxed greater and greater, until in the eighth century before Christ the golden age of prophecy reached its crest; and then, as the power of the priests became more and more, that of the prophets grew less and less, until in the last centuries before the Messiah came, the prophetic order had practically disappeared. But as Dr. Beecher says in his masterly book, "The Prophets and the Promise": "From the Christian point of view it is plausible to affirm that the succession reappeared in the person of John the Baptist, followed by Jesus Himself, and by the apostles and prophets of primitive Christianity."

When we speak of the prophets, we usually think of a comparatively few outstanding men, such as those whom we are about to study, but we must also remember the groups of smaller men popularly styled the "schools of the prophets," to correspond with our theological seminaries, but named by Dr. Beecher the "secondary

prophets." We know little about these satellites, save that in the times when prophecy flourished they were strong in numbers: at one time four hundred were assembled, and at another time, one hundred. We suspect that from their ranks were recruited many of the false prophets. But we are directly concerned only with the primary prophets, round whom these lesser lights revolved.

We may judge the prophets, first of all, by their titles. In Hebrew thought and life such names were always filled with meaning, and especially when given directly by Jehovah. In the earlier days the most common title was probably that of seer. This English term is the loose translation of two words in the Hebrew, both of which suggest a man who depended upon God for a vision of the truth which he was later to reveal to his people. This title shows the prophet's relation to God rather than to men, a relation of absolute independence. It points to the vast supernatural element in prophecy. "Where there is no vision the people perish."

This title, the seer, seems gradually to have given way to the more inclusive term, the prophet. Such a transition is reflected in an explanatory remark in the narrative about

Saul's seeking his father's asses: "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he said, 'Come and let us go to the seer'; for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer" (1 Sam. ix. 9). Scholars differ about the exact origin of this Hebrew title which we translate prophet, but all agree that it means a forth-teller, and not, as we usually think, a mere foreteller. In the corresponding Greek word, from which our English term is directly taken, the emphasis is the same: the prophet speaks for Jehovah; and so far as this title shows, his message may concern the past and the present, as well as the future. The man who had a message from Jehovah had at the same time a mission to the people.

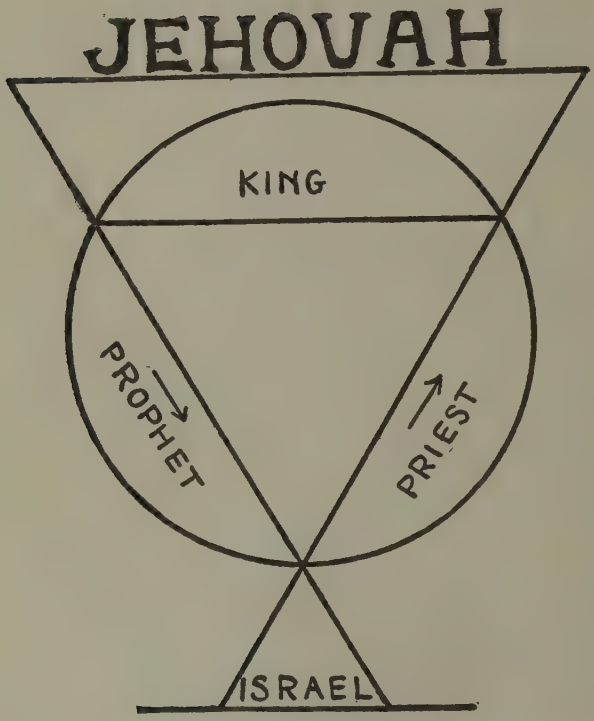
This twofold relation of the prophet appears in a striking form in Exodus vii. 1, 2: "Jehovah said unto Moses, 'See, I have made thee as God to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee; and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he let the Children of Israel go out of his land.'" Different aspects of this twofold relation are suggested by still other titles, some of which are figurative: "man of God," "man of the Spirit," "servant of Jehovah," "ambassador," "messen-

ger," "watchman," "interpreter," and "shepherd." Even more eloquent of dependence on Jehovah, and of consequent authority to speak in His name, are the various phrases by which these men prefaced their messages, of which the most common is this: "Thus saith Jehovah."

II. Their Work

The task of the prophets was to lead the chosen people in establishing the kingdom of God in the world. Such a stupendous task called for the highest gifts and graces, higher by far than those needed in the faithful priests, higher even than those required of the worthy kings. In general, the priests represented men before God; the prophets, God before men. Only a few men were by nature and by grace strong enough and good enough to serve among the primary prophets. "There were giants in the earth in those days"; "'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,' saith Jehovah of hosts."

So vast and so varied were the needs of the kingdom that there was room in the prophetic order for the widest differences in temperament, and in methods of approach to the common task. Rarely in history have there been



THE PROPHET'S RELATION TO JEHOVAH.

greater differences among good men fired with zeal for a common purpose: each prophet was moved by the Spirit to become his highest self, and in his own way to do with his might what his hand found to do in redeeming his age.

Herein lies much of the religious value of Sargent's figures: they stand before us in living forms as individual men. His prophets are not exact photographs of the men of the Bible, but they are real men, and no two of them are alike. It will be necessary for us, however, to think just now of certain broad resemblances.

The prophets, first of all, were preachers: champions of righteousness, and heralds of the Promise. The essence of preaching, according to Phillips Brooks, is twofold: truth and personality; or better still, truth through personality. And a sermon is a spiritual message from God, through a man's experience, and thence to the souls of other men. When we apply this lofty standard, where can we find such preachers as the Old Testament prophets, and such sermons as they spake and wrote? Is it any wonder that Professor James Stalker, of Glasgow, when lecturing at Yale on how to preach, devoted more than half of his course to the prophets as preachers?

These preachers are worthy of study as

masters of style. They were the leading orators of their own times, and to this day they have never been excelled. They were blessed with many gifts and graces, all of which they dedicated to their high calling; hence they spoke with tremendous force, with impassioned feeling, and with that intangible something which we call eloquence almost divine. Their writings have served as models for the orators of later times, many of whom have counted it an honour to be told that they had modelled their periods in the manner of Isaiah, the prince among orators.

The prophets could not have excelled in public speech had they not also been gifted with poetic powers. Even when not speaking in words which could be printed as poetry, they employed that sort of heightened prose which is close akin to verse. But in many of their loftiest messages, such as the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, they were speaking with all the rhythm, the beauty and the power of the most exquisite poetry; and if such passages were printed in our English Bible in a somewhat worthy form, we might catch a vision new and strange —

"Like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken."

These men of God were no mere dilettante dabblers in prose and verse. They were preachers with a message so regal that it demanded the richest garb. They were the best educated men of their times, with the broadest outlook and the deepest sympathy; hence they were the historians of their land. They were not so much the "chroniclers of wasted time" as unfolders of God's principles in dealing with His chosen people. Out of the facts which men style secular, these preachers forged messages which enforced truths the most spiritual.

We think of the prophets as professional preachers, more or less like the men in our pulpits to-day, but their contemporaries must have thought of them first of all as public men of affairs: as statesmen, reformers, politicians, iconoclasts, or traitors,—according to the point of view. As a rule the prophet kept close to his king: "And Nathan said to David, 'Thou art the man.'" Whether such a saint as Hezekiah was on the throne, or such a sinner as Ahab, the man of God persisted in declaring to the king the will of God for him and for his land; but often in vain. From the king the prophet appealed again and again to the people; and with them, too, he often failed. Sometimes, as we learn from Ezekiel, the seer

pleaded with men one by one, but here again he met with only imperfect success.

These public men were the idealists of their respective ages. They lived so far in advance of popular ideals and attainments that they aroused the opposition of the worldly nation, of the worldly kings, and of the worldly priests. The prophets were spiritual progressives: they took up old truth, presented it in new forms, and applied it fearlessly to changed conditions. The priests as a whole were religious traditionalists: they strove to keep the new wine in their old bottles, and when the bottles burst, they knew not what to do. But all the while they feared the prophets more and more, and from time to time they conspired with the rulers and the people to put the meddlesome seers out of the way! In fine, always and everywhere the prophets were "spiritual statesmen in the kingdom of God."

III. Their Spiritual Equipment

For such stupendous tasks the Spirit fully prepared these men by awakening and fostering in them a sense of absolute dependence on God. This is their most prominent characteristic. Altogether apart from such supernatural endowment, they were giants, and they would

have shone in any other sphere in which they might have been placed; but as prophets they could never have been true to God or helpful to men, had they not consciously lived and moved and had their being in Him. Their dependence appears from the manner of their call, from the holiness of their lives and from the nature of their messages.

Such a sense of dependence upon God was no happy accident. In the phrase of Moses, God "raised up" the prophets. He reared them in homes of piety; He permitted many of them to receive a liberal education, and perhaps to serve an apprenticeship in other walks of life; then He called them to their life-work, usually while they were still young. Ezekiel and others He called from the priesthood; Isaiah, from the aristocracy; Micah, from the village folk; and Amos, from the lower walks of rural life; but in each man He produced a sense of dependence upon Himself. In divers manners He called them, but He left no shadow of doubt or uncertainty that henceforth and forever they were to be, in the loftiest sense of the term, men of God.

The call of Isaiah is somewhat typical. It shows us how a youth in the Temple beheld the glory of God, and at once became conscious of

sinful speech in himself and among his people; how his lips were cleansed as by fire; how he heard the voice of the Lord, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"; how at once he replied, "Here am I; send me"; and how he was commissioned to proclaim a message so stern that only a remnant of his people would hearken. All of this is so familiar that it has not sufficiently impressed on us its central truth: the call of Isaiah made him dependent on God. With such a vision stamped upon his youthful soul, and with such a call ever sounding in his ears, he went on and on, until at last, if tradition be true, he was sawn asunder, because he had ever been loyal to his God.

The prophets were equally dependent upon God for their personal holiness. With few exceptions they felt unworthy of such a high calling, not because they knew themselves to be worse than their fellows, but because they had caught a new vision of the holiness of God and of the blackness of sin. They were afraid to trust themselves, but they learned to trust God, and so they became more and more holy. Their life itself was often their most eloquent message, and if they had been worldly, not to say vile, their words would have been worse than vain. Many of the details of their lives were

CALL of		Moses	Samuel	Amos	Isaiah	Jeremiah	Ezekiel	Paul
PREP.	HOME	Good Humble	Good	Good? Humble	Good Noble	Good (priest)	Good (priest)	Good
	EDUCATION	Excellent	Good	Poor?	Excellent	Good	Good	Excellent
CALL	AGE	Eighty	Lad	Middle age?	Youth	Youth	Thirty	Prime
	MANNER	Burning Bush	Voice	Voice	Vision	Voice	Vision	Vision
	REPLY	"Unworthy"	Willing	Willing	"Unworthy"	"Unworthy"	"Unworthy"	Willing
	COMMISSION	Partial Success	Doom	Failure	Failure	Failure	Failure	Success
LIFE	LENGTH	Forty years	Long	Brief?	Forty?	Forty-one?	Twenty-two?	Thirty-two?
	END	Sad	Sad	Martyr?	Martyr?	Martyr?	Martyr?	Martyr?

THE CALL OF REPRESENTATIVE PROPHETS.

symbols of spiritual truth. In short, these men lived as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; whether they ate or drank, or whatsoever they did, they did all for the glory of God.

These prophets were dependent upon God for revealing the truth to themselves, and for inspiring them in transmitting it to others. Such is the uniform claim of the Old Testament, and the uniform teaching of the New, which accepts at their face value these older messages from God. This is not to say that God revealed to the seers in what we style a supernatural fashion truth which they might have learned by their senses and their reason, but that He moved upon them in accordance with the natures which He had given, so that each man's message bore the impress of his own individuality, but at the same time bore unmistakable signs that it came from above. What else do they mean when they preface their messages with the familiar words, "Thus saith Jehovah"?

The truth outlined in the last few paragraphs is the most important in this book, and the most difficult to unfold. Let us leave it, therefore, with the simple conclusion that we know almost nothing worth knowing about the prophets, unless we remember that so far as they were true, they were absolutely dependent upon God.

"No prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."

IV. Their Independence

These men of God were in the noblest sense men of their own times. They were no mere hermits or monks, garbed in weird, fantastic attire, stealing out from their musty caves to utter their gloomy forebodings, and then slinking back into their seclusion. They were practical men of affairs, as well as dreamers of dreams; and they never ceased to feel that they were integral parts of the people, whose burdens they must share, and over whose sins they must weep. When called to be seers, they came out from the midst of their people, only in the sense that they became more holy, and that they stood closer to God, so that they might unfold His truth to their fellows. Of the genuine seer it could scarcely be said, "He was a star, and dwelt apart."

In a most vital sense, nevertheless, these men of God were independent of the people. They never adapted their deeds or their words so as to conform to the whims or the threats of the world. They depended directly upon God for

their food and drink; and while ordinarily they must have received their means of livelihood through the regular channels of the Church, they held themselves free to rebuke the sins of the hands which fed them. They must at times have received what the world would style a meager and precarious subsistence; but they tell us little about such things, which in their eyes bulked quite small. When they were accused of talking for bread, however, they must have been struck to the heart. "Amaziah said unto Amos, 'O thou seer, go, flee thou away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there.'"

> "Just for a handful of silver he left us
> Just for a riband to stick in his coat."

Many a man strong enough to resist the open temptations of money has yielded to the more subtle temptation to speak in such a pleasing fashion as to become popular and famous; but so entirely had the prophets yielded themselves to Jehovah that they could resist the demands of a people clamouring for smooth sayings, and threatening to slay them if they did not comply. Their attitude may be inferred from this message to Ezekiel, at a time when for the nonce it had become the proper thing to go

and hear the prophet preach. "Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not."

"Lord, who hath believed our report?" If the prophets had been as sad of countenance as Sargent would make us believe, it would not have been merely because they longed to be popular, but because their people would not repent. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" And when these holiest of men faced martyrdom unafraid, it was because they had received from the Lord, and had delivered to His people, a higher standard of religion and of life than the people were willing to receive or to obey. Of the prophets it has been written—"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword . . . of whom the world was not worthy."

V. Their Credentials

The fate of many of these saints raises an interesting question. They were messengers from Jehovah; why then were they not received as such, and treated with the respect due to men

of their character and mission? Were they not properly accredited? Yes; from Moses to Malachi every true prophet fully attested his right to speak to his people; but as Jeremiah quickly discovered, the human heart is deceitful above all things, and it can easily invent countless excuses for hating the bearer of unwelcome tidings. In view of the clearness and the variety of the credentials which the prophets bore, only a people whose eyes were blinded by sin could have refused to behold in them the ambassadors of the King.

Their first credential was the fulfillment of their predictions. "How shall we know the word which Jehovah hath not spoken? 'When a prophet speaketh in the name of Jehovah, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which Jehovah hath not spoken'" (Deut. xviii. 21, 22). Many scholars make light of this test, but it never seemed to the prophets themselves to be a matter of indifference whether their predictions were fulfilled or not. When Ezekiel was sad at heart because his people heard him only with the hearing of the ear, he received from the Lord a word to reassure him: "When this cometh to pass (behold it cometh!) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them."

Another credential, to which many scholars suppose the prophets to have attached undue weight, was their performance of miracles. Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, not to speak of the final Prophet, performed mighty works, not only as supernatural object lessons to illustrate and enforce their teachings, and as deeds of mercy to relieve human distress, but largely as signs to prove that they spoke for God. It is only fair to add, however, that such powers were not given to the prophets of every age, but as a rule, only at a few crises in redemptive history. A casual glance at the periods when miracles were prominent in the work of the prophets will show that many of them, including some of the greatest, relied almost altogether upon proofs less external.

The ultimate credential of a prophet, after all, was purely spiritual. For want of better words, scholars style this the self-evidencing power of the truth, and to this spiritual test they ascribe unmeasured importance; so did the men themselves; and so should we. In the seer's consciousness of a call, in his holiness of life, and above all else, in his revelation of truth which could hail only from above, he proved his right to speak for God. Such spiritual credentials could fitly appeal only to other

men of the Spirit. "He that is of the truth heareth my voice." The Spirit would witness with the spirits of the saints that the seer was a man of God. But, alas, the average man who weighed the claims of the prophet was by no means a saint. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them for they are spiritually judged." It should be evident long ere this why a nation which was waxing more and more worldly should often have applauded the false prophets, and have slain the true.

VI. Their Teaching

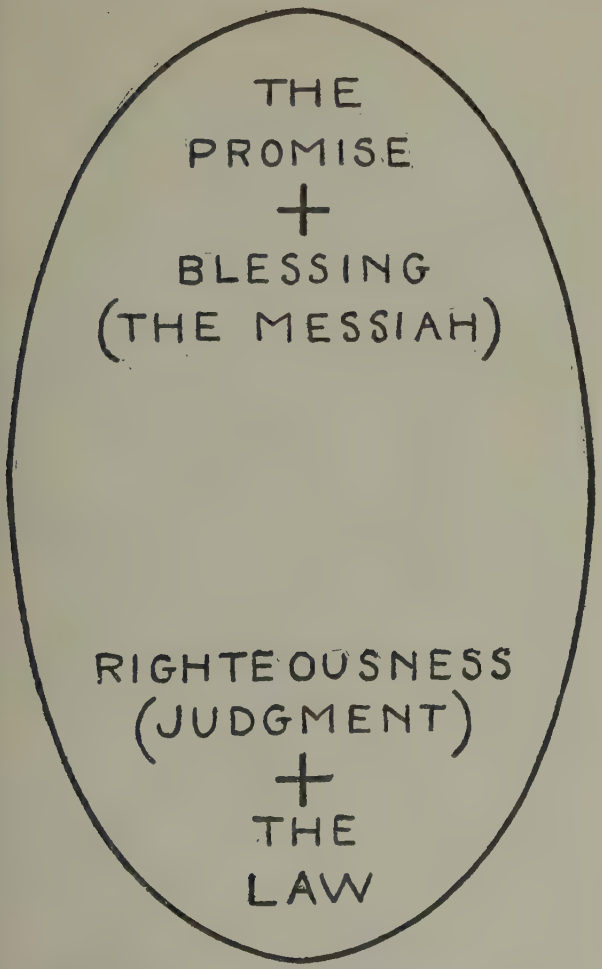
Above all things else, the prophets were moral and religious teachers. Their lives were a constant rebuke to sin, and a constant incentive to righteousness. Some of them, such as Elijah, taught by action, rather than by written words, but the other men whom we are to study taught by pen, as well as by deed and word. Each man differed from every other in teaching as in character; but beneath these differences lay certain broad resemblances. Their teaching may be viewed as an ellipse, of which the lower focus was the Law, which is righteousness, and the upper

focus was the Promise, which culminated in the Messiah. Round these two foci all prophecy revolved: one prophet kept closer to the Law, and another gazed more often at the Promise; at one time, a prophet dealt more directly with the Law, and at another time, with the Promise; but when dealing with the Law, the prophet ever saw in the distance as a star of hope the Promise; and when gazing directly at the Promise, his feet were ever planted upon the solid rock, the Law of righteousness.

The Promise culminated in the Messiah, but the moral and religious teaching, of which the heart was the Law, likewise prepared for His coming. Without the Promise, the Law might have become too largely a matter of outward religious observance; without the Law, the Promise would have been too exclusively a spiritual theory; but together these two prepared the way for the coming of the King. The prophets rose to their loftiest heights when they pointed men's weary eyes to the Redeemer, but if they had not unfolded the spiritual beauty and power of the kingdom which He would come to establish, they could not have prepared the hearts even of the remnant of their people to receive the King. To adopt another figure, the Promise gleamed

forth here and there and yonder on the loftiest peaks of prediction; but the Law of righteousness was ever beneath, as the mountain range to support those sun-lit peaks.

Many scholars will not accept such a view of the facts of prophecy. Rationalists of the more extreme type, such as the successors of that brilliant Frenchman, Rénan, rule out from prophecy all prediction, so far as it would presuppose supernatural guidance. Allegorists of the more extreme type, followers of Origen, think of prophecy as composed almost entirely of prediction. Religious teachers in America to-day swing towards one or the other of these extremes. Apart from a comparatively small school, composed of our most spiritual men, such as my own beloved teacher, the late Dr. W. G. Moorehead,—the modern age is swinging more and more to the side of the rationalists; we are tempted to see in the prophetic books fewer and still fewer predictions. If we were forced to choose between these two extremes, all of us who love the Lord would choose to ally ourselves with those who strive to behold Him where He is scarcely to be found, rather than with those who see in the Old Testament no highway prepared for our King.



THE FOCI OF PROPHETIC TEACHING.

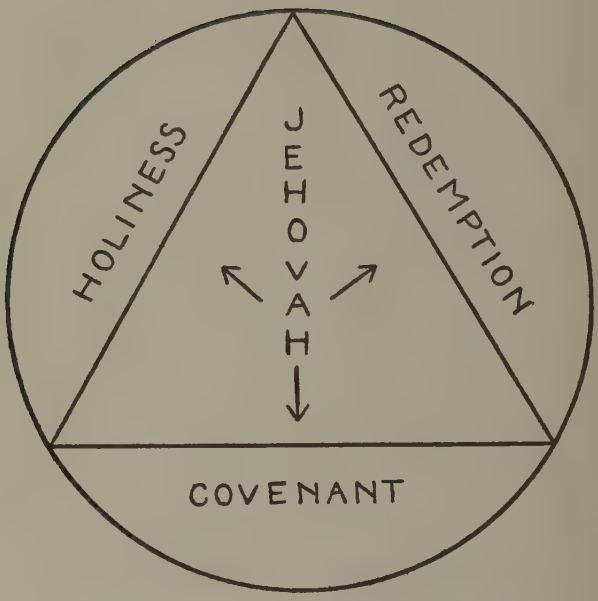
The present course of studies frankly proceeds from the assumption that the truth lies between these two extremes, but far closer to the allegorical than to the rationalistic; that each of these schools is correct, at least in part, in what it affirms, but incorrect, at least in part, in what it denies. The allegorical school says with truth that there is in prophecy a large and precious element of prediction, without which it could scarcely have survived; the rationalist replies with equal truth that there is here a vast body of historical fact, without which prophecy could never have been born. The great body of thinkers, including some of the more conservative and orthodox, such as my own revered teachers, Dr. Vos, of Princeton, and Dr. Wishart, of Xenia, as well as many of the more liberal scholars, such as Dr. George Adam Smith and the late Dr. A. B. Davidson, both of Scotland, occupy stations somewhere in this vast middle ground, where they can view both the broad base and the lofty peaks of the mountain range. As a body many of these men style themselves the Historical School.

VII. The Non-Predictive Element

Instead of assuming that the prophet was merely a foreteller, and that prophecy was

simply a "premature unrolling of the history of the future to gratify an idle curiosity," a sort of mirror held up to reflect the course of coming events, let us take for granted that the prophet always and everywhere was an ethical and spiritual teacher, addressing real people in the midst of a real world, and for their spiritual nourishment or their reclamation, revealing more fully the spiritual teachings of the Law of righteousness. To his own people, first of all, these God-breathed messages were "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness."

Prophetic teaching dealt largely with the past, to "justify the ways of God to men," by showing how He had dealt with His chosen people, and how from His point of view all history should rebuke sin and encourage righteousness. This teaching dealt largely also with the present, in which the man of God pointed out the way of truth and duty, in obedience to the same Law, and warned his people not to walk in the way of the world. Upon such a broad, deep foundation of solid fact, the inspired prophet could base the loftiest structure of predictive hope, for "the prophecies were not human ideals but divine ideas." Any reader who wishes to



THREE FUNDAMENTALS OF PROPHETIC TEACHING.

follow out this line of thought should consult that masterly book from which the phrase above is taken, "The Doctrine of the Prophets," by the late Dr. A. F. Kirkpatrick.

The will of God, as revealed by these forthtellers, "by divers portions and in divers manners," contained at least three vast and distinctive spiritual truths, which lay close to the heart of the entire Old Testament. First, Jehovah was the God of Israel. Second, Jehovah, the God of holiness, demanded holiness in His people. Third, since He did not find holiness, He would redeem His people. The last of these three, and the highest, was purely predictive; but we cannot separate the three, even in our thought. Each of these vast ideas was ever present, on the surface or in the depths, in the message of every true prophet, but in no two men were these truths mingled in the same proportion, or voiced with the same emphasis.

In the pages which follow, we shall consider certain of the prophets as exponents of these three truths, but we must never forget that for the sake of simplicity we may easily sacrifice the truth. Amos was the prophet of holiness; Hosea was the prophet of redemption; Isaiah was the prophet of faith; and Jeremiah was

the prophet of the Covenant. Yes! But at the same time each of these men was the prophet of many other truths. It is easy to say that Paul was the apostle of faith; John, of love; Peter, of hope; and James, of good works. But such broad distinctions, convenient as they may be to us, are almost foreign to the Bible, and especially to the Old Testament. Even as all these graces abounded, though in varying degrees, in the life of each of the apostles, so did all three of those divine ideas abound in the teaching of every true prophet, but always with a difference.

VIII. The Predictive Element

If these sturdy men of old had known that any person would ever strive to explain away the predictive element in their work, they would have been astounded. Fulfillment of prediction, as we have seen, was one of their divine credentials, and almost without exception they expressly claimed to tell the will of God about things as yet not seen. If this claim was a mistake, not to use a blacker word, these men were false. Listen to Amos: "Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, except He reveal His secret unto His servants the prophets." The immediate purpose of Jehovah in

revealing His will concerning the future was ever to influence the minds and hearts of the prophet's hearers, but it would be folly to limit any prediction to its immediate purpose.

Some of these predictions, such as Micah's pointing to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Redeemer, were concrete and specific; others, such as Amos's portrayal of doom upon Israel, were more general. As a rule with many exceptions, predictions were more specific and definite when uttered near the hour of fulfillment. For convenience we may group predictions into three classes: first, those which foretold the impending doom of the chosen people; second, those which foretold their subsequent restoration; and third, those which foretold the ultimate blessedness of the Messianic kingdom, "which was to be at once the consummation of the past, and the starting point of the future." Only through this Messiah could an unholy people become the children of the holy God of the Covenant.

The study of the fulfillment of predictions is too large a task and too difficult for such a series as this. Such difficulty springs from three facts. First, a single prediction might refer immediately to a passing event, and more remotely to a similar but vastly more impor-

tant event in the future. For example, the Book of Isaiah portrayed the Servant of Jehovah, a figure which in some cases pointed to Israel and at the same time to the Messiah. In the Master's words in the latter portion of the Gospel according to Matthew, who can put his finger upon this passage or upon that, and say for certain whether the Master was speaking about the fall of Jerusalem, about the end of the age, or about both events?

Almost equally baffling is the fact that many a prediction was conditional, and that the condition might not appear on the surface. This fact appears from Jeremiah xviii. 1–10, where one should note that mighty, little word, "if." If the nation concerning which God had spoken evil turned from their evil, He would repent of the evil that He had thought to do unto them. If the nation concerning which He had spoken good turned and did evil in His sight, He would repent of the good. For example, think of Jonah's prediction at Nineveh; if we did not know the sequel, how far could we interpret the prediction? Think of many a bright promise which never yet has seen its fulfillment; how do we know whether or not it may have tarried in vain for obedience to its implied condition? This baffling fact should not

deter us from reading the Old Testament in the light of the New, but it should increase our caution and our humility when we attempt to interpret passing events in the light of prophecy.

The third disconcerting fact about Old Testament predictions is that many of them yet await their fulfillment. Here again, wise men differ; but we who love the Lord will be slow to believe that the Gospel according to Isaiah referred solely to days long since gone by; we prefer rather to look forward to the fulfillment on earth and in heaven of those blessed promises which from age to age keep unfolding, even as the seed develops into the rose-bush, and the bush brings forth the bud, and the bud unfolds into the perfect bloom. "We see not yet all things . . . but we see Jesus."

IX. Their Permanent Value

Why does Paul say that the man of God who would be complete, furnished unto every good work, should know the ancient Scriptures, of which these prophecies form a large portion? Because these messages were inspired; because these holy men of God spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. If we wish to learn God's idea of a man, we shall do well to look long and closely at these seers

who largely resembled the one perfect Man. In any one of them, as in few men else, we can behold the power of an inspired personality, and at the same time feel the attraction of a most unique and pleasing individuality. We moderns are sadly in need of such a hero as Elijah or Hosea.

We should go to these books often, and tarry with them long, because of the truth which they reveal. The external garb of the truth varies from age to age, but the truth itself is eternal. The truth in the prophets, with their tremendous emphasis upon righteousness, and with their ceaseless unveiling of man's only ground for hope, even the Promise, as fulfilled in the Christ,—this truth, presented in countless hues, the world should not willingly let die. The great reason, after all, why we should study the prophets is because they prepared the way for the coming of Christ. Here again, one can only quote from Kirkpatrick, from whom are taken more than a few suggestions in this chapter.

"Old Testament prophecy is still a living message for the Christian Church. Its fulfillment does not mean that its use is at an end, so that it may be laid on one side, because its purpose and significance are exhausted. Nor

does it mean that for us the sole use of prophecy is as one of the credentials which attest Christ's mission. It is this, and as such it would claim our reverent study; but it is far more. It is not fulfilled and exhausted, but fulfilled and illuminated, and we must read it in the light of that illumination. Thence we may derive comfort and courage, as we watch the methods by which God works out His purposes, educates the world, establishes His kingdom in it. There we may see that He is indeed the living God, Who rules in the affairs of men: 'the Alpha and the Omega, the Lord God, which is and which was, and which is to come, the All-Sovereign.'"

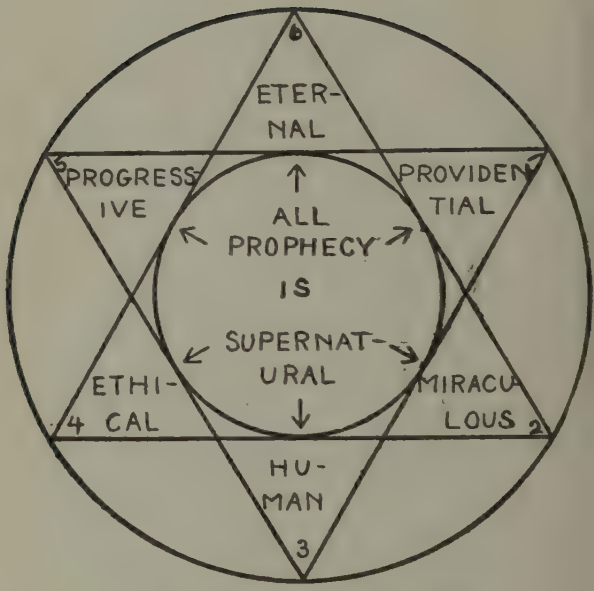
We who preach should live close to these prophets, not only that we may introduce them to the good folk whom we teach, but that we may learn through them the secret by which we too may become forth-tellers of truth divine. We are not inspired as they were, and so we cannot predict things hidden from the eyes of men in the pew, but we also are "citizens with a message," called to speak in the name of the Lord, and woe be to us if we prove unworthy of our prophetic heritage! That was an illuminating word spoken by a seminary student in Pittsburgh, when he was

asked why he worshipped regularly in the Eighth Church, of which Dr. W. I. Wishart is pastor. "I go to hear him because he always has a message for me from God." What a commentary on the preaching of some of us whom he did not go to hear!

By inspiration each prophet delivered his message directly to the men before him. He was dealing with truth which changed, only in the sense that it unfolded more and more from age to age, but from the vast world of truth he chose such portions as his hearers needed, and on the basis of that truth he demanded an immediate verdict against sin, and in favour of righteousness. His message was timely, because it voiced eternal truth in a way which followed the line of least resistance into the hearts and consciences of all that heard. It is small wonder, then, that the prophet knew the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and that he went to his death as a martyr for eternal truth. "Who follows in his train?"

If the prophets had been merely men of their day, and nothing more, we should never have known their names. They owe the immortality of their writings to the same Lord to Whom they owe the immortality of their souls. In God's grace they bore no little part

in preparing the Church for the coming of her Lord. And if we are worthy to follow them even from afar, while we shall be careful to speak in a tongue which the children of our own age can understand, we shall be vastly more anxious to turn men's gaze ever towards Him, Who is the end of prophecy as well as its beginning, "the same yesterday, to-day and forever."



Six Elements of Prophecy.
Illustrated in the Life of Elijah.

II

ELIJAH: THE PROPHET OF FIRE

THE title above is taken from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, where it is applied to this man of God. Nothing could more fitly describe the character and the work of Elijah, as the John the Baptist of the Old Testament. Fire is a symbol of God's wrath against sin, and of His blessing upon righteousness. Such is the heart of the message of Elijah, a message delivered to us not so much in his words, as in the record of his life and of his deeds. Unlike the other seers who are to pass before us, this man was moved by the Holy Spirit to write no book; but fortunately we know him so well that his life itself is a searching prophetic message.

When Elijah began to prophesy in the Northern Kingdom, in the ninth century before Christ, the fires of pure religion were almost dead upon the altars of the nation and of its homes. After the Ten Tribes had seceded and had established their capital at Samaria, they

had set up their high places at Dan and at Bethel, and had begun to worship Jehovah by means of idols. Ere long they had come to think more of their idols than of their God, and had begun to use them in the worship of alien deities. They had swiftly deteriorated in moral ideals and actions, for idolatry ever saps spiritual strength. Surely the land was in need of a prophet!

When Elijah began his work of restoration, Ahab and Jezebel were on the throne; perhaps it would be more correct to give Jezebel the prior mention, for she was ever more than her husband. Ahab was to be guilty of sins many and black, but in nothing could he offend Jehovah more than in wedding this blood-thirsty daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre, who had murdered his predecessor, that he might usurp the throne. Jezebel united in herself all the evil traits of a Mary Queen of Scots and of a Lady Macbeth. The new queen did not abandon her devotion to Baal. Not content with knowing that marriage between two royal houses betokened a covenant between their presiding deities, she at once inaugurated an adroit campaign to supplant the simple and spiritual forms of the worship of Jehovah by the foul and cruel rites of the worship of Baal.

King Ahab was almost powerless in the hands of his queen. If he could have chosen an equally strong and gifted wife, as devoted to Jehovah as Jezebel was to Baal, he might have hearkened to Elijah, and have become a power for righteousness. Apart from his religious policy, Ahab was a successful ruler; his reign as a whole was marked by unprecedented prosperity; he increased the commerce of the land and entered upon an extensive program of internal improvements; and he was anxious that his tiny kingdom should take its place among the world powers. For all of this the world would acclaim him as a ruler wise and strong, but through Elijah God pronounced judgment against a king who would try to serve both Jehovah and Baal, a king who would recognize Jehovah in the names given to his children, and who at the same time would countenance the queen in her incessant attempts to substitute Baal as the supreme deity in Israel.

I. Kindling the Flame in the Prophet's Heart

(The Providential Element in Prophecy)

Before Elijah could become God's agent in kindling the flame on the altar of his nation, and in the homes of his people, he needed to pass through a deep spiritual experience, which

came to him in a fashion as unpleasant as it was unexpected. He went to Ahab with a message of judgment: "As Jehovah, the God of Israel, liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Then he took refuge by the lonely brook, Cherith, where he depended solely upon God for food and drink. The drought began. While it lasted Ahab and Jezebel could live upon past supplies or upon imports, but the seer, whom they must have pitied because he had not where to lay his head, was supplied by the ravens with bread and flesh, night and morning. Thus he must have learned more deeply that truth which is the heart of the prophetic ministry,—absolute dependence upon God. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him."

God cares for the bodily needs of His servants until their work on earth is done, and sometimes He employs strange means. Modern thinkers who try to explain away all that is unusual, not to say miraculous, in the Bible, and who scoff at the record that a man in hiding was fed by dumb ravens, should send to the China Inland Mission for a leaflet telling how in recent years a native worker, in that land where famine is all too frequent, was fed in al-

most the same manner as Elijah, and doubtless with the same blessed results. God in His providence is ever free to employ any means to care for His children, and thus to deepen in their hearts the sense of absolute dependence.

A spiritual experience need not last after its lesson has been learned. Elijah needed also to learn deeper sympathy with suffering mankind; and so when the brook dried up, he was led by the Spirit to Zarephath, a town near the birthplace of Jezebel; and among those people who worshipped another deity, he lived in the house of a widow almost as poor as himself. By accepting her hospitality he gave her the joy of those who entertain angels unawares: he called forth her faith in securing the food for her unexpected guest; and a little later he restored to her the son who was the pride of her heart. But great as was the blessing to the widow, it was scarcely to be compared with the blessing to the prophet, for he learned to sympathize most deeply with suffering mankind.

At last the flame was fully kindled in the prophet's heart. By simple human experiences he had learned more fully to depend upon Jehovah, and to sympathize with the suffering poor. Without these two lessons he could

never have gone forward as the prophet of fire. If he had never slept and awaked by Cherith's quiet stream, he could never have stood and conquered on Carmel's wooded slope. If he had never lived as a pensioner on the bounty of that poor widow in Zarephath, he could never have defied the king at Naboth's vineyard. In preparing a prophet for his mighty tasks, providence makes no blunders.

"So, take and use thy work,
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the work as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!"

II. Kindling the Flame on the Nation's Altar

(The Miraculous Element in Prophecy)

At last the prophet was ready for his work, and that work was enough to appall the stoutest heart. In the name of God he must defy Ahab and Jezebel, together with all of her imported priests of Baal, and restore in the land the worship of the God of Israel. The record of the contest which ensued on Mount Carmel is one of the most majestic narratives in the Bible

(1 Kings xviii.). In the most graphic form this contest illustrates the endless conflict between truth and error, as well as the ultimate triumph of the truth. It is interesting to know that tradition ascribes this most spectacular scene in the life of our most spectacular prophet to the twentieth day of July.

Such details must never for an instant obscure the mighty issues at stake on this contest. Carmel was a test of Jehovah's power and of His right to the exclusive rule in Israel, as well as of Elijah's prophetic mission and of his right to represent Jehovah. It required rare courage for him to go out to meet the king; but when did a true prophet ever know the name of fear? He was warned by Obadiah, a good man who thought discretion the better part of valour, but on he went. Ahab met him with a bitter reproach, "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" but he replied that the king himself, by encouraging the nation to be untrue, had troubled Israel; and in proof he challenged the king to arrange a contest between the imported priests of Baal, and Elijah alone as the representative of Jehovah. The king assented, as he might not have done if he had first consulted his wily queen.

Elijah's proposition was most daring, for if

he had not succeeded, his cause would have failed, and he himself would quickly have died; but he was determined at every cost to force a definite decision for Jehovah; and he knew that Jehovah never fails. In proposing the terms to govern this contest, Elijah showed that he was what we moderns should style a true sportsman. While most careful to guard against chance for fraud or deception, he was most generous to his hated foes: he gave them the advantage of numbers, of the first trial, and of the time of day. He carefully prescribed a contest which would be favourable to the claims of Baal, the god of fire. "The god that answereth by fire, let him be god." In all of this, as a matter of course, the prophet was following the guidance of Jehovah.

The first trial began early in the morning, and proceeded until midday. The devotees of Baal worshipped the rising sun, but with all their gorgeous ritual, they could bring down no fire to consume the waiting sacrifice. At noon Elijah mocked them: "Cry aloud; for he is a god; either he is musing or he is gone aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked!" With such sarcastic taunts ringing in their ears, and with all the people listening to these tokens of

their failure, it is small wonder that the priests "cried aloud, and cut themselves with knives and lances, till the blood gushed out upon them." But all their frantic efforts were in vain, and after consuming the remainder of the day in hopeless pleadings for fire from the god of fire, they were forced tacitly to admit their failure. They could only hope that their foe would likewise fail.

Elijah knew that he would not fail. In every step he showed his faith. The day was already far spent, but there was ample time for Jehovah to work. The prophet took every precaution, so that the people might not later ascribe his victory to fraud. He engaged in no lengthy ritual, but uttered a prayer both simple and brief; then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt offering, together with all that was near. Never was there a clearer and a more striking demonstration of the power of Jehovah, and of His blessing upon one of His prophets.

The immediate effect of this victory was most impressive. All day long the people had been watching the contest, with growing intensity; they had heard the sarcastic taunts of Elijah,—which appear to us to have been too strong, until we remember what a reflex in-

fluence they must have had upon the people; and when at last they saw the end, they fell upon their faces, and cried out, "Jehovah, He is God! Jehovah, He is God!"—words which in the original sound strangely like the name of Elijah. Then the prophet ordered the slaughter of the priests of Baal. Here again our delicate sensibilities are shocked, until we remember that these men were almost as guilty of treachery as alien spies in America could be to-day. When those priests had followed Jezebel into the land, in order to lead the people to change their religion, they must have known that failure would be followed by death. If they had been permitted to live on in the land, the victory of Elijah would have been a mockery. It was better that they should die than that the nation through them should perish.

The ultimate effect of the victory on Carmel was greater by far than appeared on the surface. First impressions, it is true, quickly began to fade from the faces of that fickle folk; but the truth continued its silent work in their hearts; and "Truthe will delivre, hit is no drede." Never again would Elijah be so persecuted for righteousness' sake, and never more would prophet need to remind the people that Jehovah was at least nominally the God of

Israel. After the victory on Carmel, idolatry did not cease, and from time to time large numbers of the people worshipped other gods, but as a whole Israel was committed henceforth to the service of Jehovah; no longer could she go limping between the two sides;—and all because of the faith of Elijah. "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith."

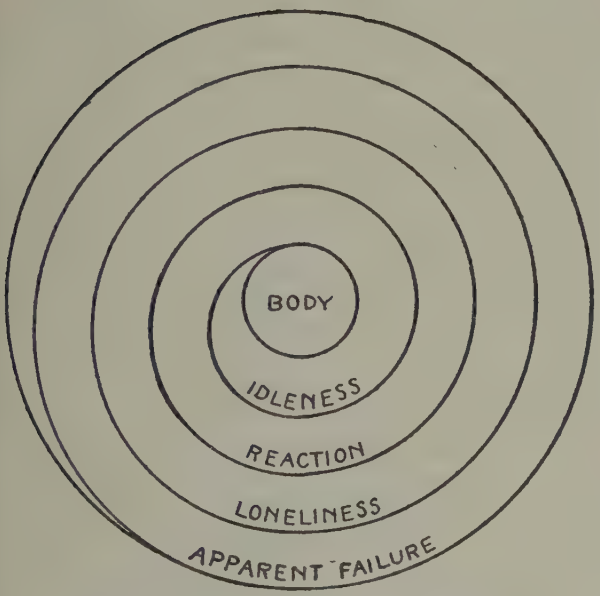
III. The Fire Burns Low in the Prophet's Heart

(The Human Element in Prophecy)

"The human heart is strange above all things." After the triumph on Mount Carmel we might well expect Elijah to rejoice, but soon we behold him struggling with himself in the darkest day of his life. Forced to flee from the fury of that tigress on the throne, he had taken refuge in Judah, and leaving his servant, had gone a day's journey into the wilderness, where we see him sitting under a juniper tree, and requesting for himself that he might die. Who would expect ever to see Elijah downcast? Like Moses and Peter and many another strong man, he failed in his strongest point. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are."

The causes of his despair were cumulative: his nerves had been subject to a mighty strain, prolonged through the hours of a long, long day, and when the period of inactivity came, he could not easily relax. After his spectacular success, reaching its climax when the shouts of his people rang in his ears, came the reaction, when he felt that he was alone in the world, alone among the prophets, alone among the people, and worst of all, alone against Jezebel. Like an echo of despair, which might soon sink into remorse, sounds out this dire lament, "Alone!" He felt, too, that he had failed: immediate results from his triumph had apparently flitted away with the rising of the morrow's sun; and the permanent results had not yet begun to appear. The people who had shouted for Jehovah on Carmel had not dared to fight for Him at Jezreel, and the prophet must have wondered whether it had been worth his while to hazard his life for such a fickle folk.

Equally interesting and instructive were the ways in which the Heavenly Father soothed the heart of this downcast child. "Like as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." As the mother of a petulant child gives first heed to the little body, so the



CUMULATIVE CAUSES OF DESPAIR.
Illustrated in Elijah.

(Suggestion ; Prepare two similar charts, one showing the causes of John the Baptist's despair ; the other showing the cure of Elijah's despair.)

Lord soothed Elijah to sleep; and when he awoke, refreshed and hungry, the Lord sent an angel to feed him, and then despatched him on a pilgrimage, that he might revive his memory of former days, and feel the soothing touch of nature. On Mount Horeb the prophet heard the still, small voice of Jehovah, as perhaps he had never heard it before, and he caught a vision of the forces that were upon the side of Jehovah, even seven thousand that would never bow the knee to Baal. He learned, too, that God had not failed, for victory was coming, and that he himself was to be no small factor in the conquest. Surely God's comfort, as the cure for man's despondency, is cumulative!

How human, after all, these prophets must have been! How typical the causes of Elijah's despair, and the ways in which the Heavenly Father quieted the heart of this troubled child! Elijah must have been tempted in all points like as we are, and not without sin. Instead of thinking of him and his successors as dim, shadowy figures stalking before us out of the misty past, let us know them as they really were, men like ourselves, but larger. With Paul they could say, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." When they became prophets, they did not cease to be men.

IV. Kindling the Royal Conscience

(The Ethical Element in Prophecy)

All of the prophets were preachers of righteousness, and none more so than Elijah. Sometimes they appear to us to have been like many scholars to-day, who are so much concerned about the theory of life that they give small thought to its practice; but nothing could be further from the truth about the prophets. They arose to reveal the spiritual aspects of the Law of righteousness, as given through Moses; to show how it was being trampled under the feet of those who called themselves the children of God; and how such sin could not escape God's righteous judgment. They spoke primarily to the conscience of the nation, but they had an ethical message for the individual, too, as we shall soon see, when Elijah faces the king in Naboth's vineyard.

After three years of successful war against his rival, Benhadad, King of Syria, Ahab became arrogant, and yielded to covetousness, that ever-present temptation of kings. In an age when the rich were beginning to think of ivory palaces, Ahab longed to extend his gardens so as to include the petty vineyard of his humble neighbour; and to his credit be it told, he offered to buy this vineyard, or to give a

better one in its stead. But Naboth, pious and sentimental, refused to part with his ancestral heritage, for he knew that the law of God was on his side, even against his king. Ahab sulked, until he aroused the scorn of Jezebel, who reminds one here of Lady Macbeth—"Infirm of purpose, give me the dagger!" But Lady Macbeth was plotting for a throne; Queen Jezebel, for a bit of ground!

In rebuking the greed of the royal pair, as well as the perjury and the murder which it caused, Elijah spoke as "the personified conscience of the nation," and heaped upon the king's head such burning coals that he repented, and his sentence of doom was suspended. Never again would Ahab behold the face of the prophet whom he considered his tormentor and his enemy; the Spirit no more would strive with this king who was weak rather than deliberately wicked, a tool in the hands of a great, bad queen. In all of this we behold the high moral standards of the Old Testament prophets, of whom in a sense Elijah was one of the first, and one of the greatest.

V. Passing the Torch to Another Prophet
(The Progressive Element in Prophecy)

The figure suggested in this popular subtitle is taken from the Greek games, where

teams of runners contested for a prize, each team forming a relay and passing the burning torch from one man to another until the last reached the goal; the winning team was not merely the quickest in completing the course, but that which kept its torch alive. So we must think of these men of old, not as independent of each other, but as bound together in closest unity by their one calling and by their pursuit of that goal towards which all the Old Testament saints were striving. From age to age, one after another finished his course and dropped out to await his reward, but not until he had passed on to another the truth which must never touch the ground, or cease to shine. Elijah must give way to Elisha. "He must increase, but I must decrease."

To succeed Elijah required no little strength of heart and will. The prophet of fire never taught us to use every wile in inveigling callow youths to enter the sacred ministry. Instead of pleading with Elisha to become a prophet, or tacitly encouraging him to seek that high office, Elijah tested his spirit by strong dissuasion. The young man's persistent importunity showed that in him was the stuff of which prophets are made. He knew that he had been called from above, and he insisted

that he must take the torch which Elijah was soon to give up. Elisha met the condition prescribed: he saw the departing prophet, and took up his mantle as a token that he was to have the boon which he had craved, even a double portion of the spirit of Elijah. In modern phrase this means, not that he received twice as much of the Spirit's beauty and power as filled the heart of Elijah, but that Elisha also was to be fitly prepared to keep the torch aflame, until he too should pass it on to another hand.

VI. The Shining of a Heavenly Light
(The Eternal Element in Prophecy)

Our study of Elijah cannot be complete unless we glance at him on the Mount of Transfiguration. We often ask ourselves why he, rather than one of the later prophets, such as Isaiah, should have appeared on that Mount. No one can answer our query, which would be futile did it not increase our respect for Elijah. Too often we forget that throughout the history of the Northern Kingdom he was the most beloved prophetic hero; that during the Paschal Feast in the orthodox Hebrew home to-day, the door is kept ajar that Elijah may come in; that at the christening there is a vacant chair for him; and most significant of all, that no

other Old Testament prophet is mentioned so often in the New.

Many of these references in the New Testament concern John the Baptist, who fulfilled such predictions as that of Malachi: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come." Though separated far in time, these two had much in common: each was a prophet of fire; each lived largely apart from his fellows; each was garbed in rough apparel; each made a startling entrance into public life; each excelled in simplicity, in strength, in sternness, in courage, and in zeal; each fell into the deepest despair; each left us only a few words, written down by others, for the man was ever more vital than his message; and each was a reformer calling on his people to repent —

"'All ye whose hopes rely
On God, with me amidst these deserts mourn,
Repent, repent, and from old errors turn!'
Only the echoes, which he made relent,
Rung from their flinty caves, 'Repent, Repent!'"

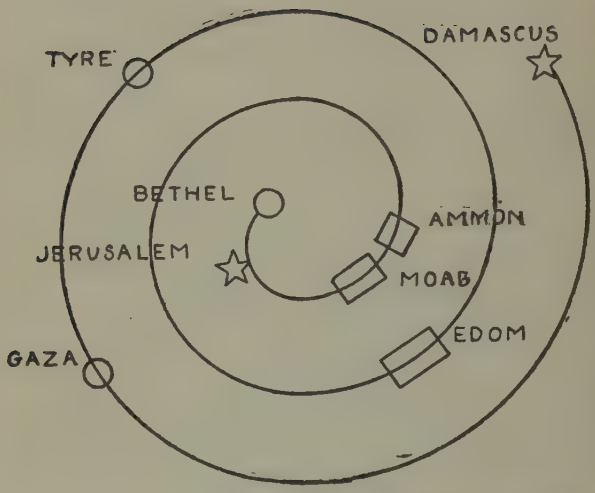
The parallel between John and Elijah is longer still: each of them met with the most determined resistance from a royal pair, of

whom the woman had her will; and each ended his work before it was complete, although it would be scarcely correct to say that Elijah prepared the way for Elisha as John prepared the way for Jesus. When we recall the Master's appraisal of John the Baptist, we must heighten our estimate of Elijah. John was a prophet, and more than a prophet; he was as great as the greatest of Old Testament saints and seers; and so we begin to see why the John of the Old Testament was counted worthy to appear with Moses on the Mount, and there to represent the prophetic order.

Far more vital than our query why this particular prophet should have appeared on the Mount, is the fact that a prophet appeared, and that he spake with the Lord about the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. The law and the prophets alike most clearly reveal their eternal value when they come closest to the Christ of the cross. Elijah is not dead: his times have passed away; but his call for righteousness sounds forth from age to age through men upon whom his mantle has fallen.

The truth which was in Elijah is eternal, because it is the same truth which in its final form is in Jesus Christ. In a word, this truth is righteousness. For this truth the modern world

is hungering and thirsting, but to many of us who prate about the things of God, the world is calling in vain. We have fallen upon evil days, when covetousness, which is idolatry, is sapping the strength of many of us who style ourselves children of God. We need more men of the spirit and power of Elijah, the seer of righteousness, the prophet of fire.



(*Adapted from Dr. W. W. White.*)

THE REBUKES OF AMOS.
(Chapters I and II.)

III

AMOS: THE HERDSMAN FROM THE HILLS

THE prophets lived and spoke largely in God's great out-of-doors, and to this day their messages appeal most strongly to men and women who live close to nature. These messages are well adapted for study at summer conferences, which are usually held in groves, and often in the open air. In such a place as Montreat, for example, so far as natural surroundings are concerned, these men would have felt much at home, and on every hand they would have found illustrations of their messages —

> "Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

No other prophet was more fully a son of the wild than Amos. He was a herdsman from the hills of Tekoa, a village five miles southwest of Bethlehem. This region was known as

a desert, and was to be the scene of the preaching of John the Baptist, as well as of the temptation of Jesus. Tekoa was situated on a hill, adapted only to grazing, and it seems to have been as forbidding in all else as in location. Moderns would style it God-forsaken. Among these rugged hills, where wild beasts of various sorts abounded, Amos herded cattle, which may have belonged to another, and eked out a niggardly living by pruning sycamore trees. Can any good thing come out of Tekoa?

Amos was reared in the Southern Kingdom, but so far as we can tell, he prophesied only in Israel. He seems to have expected to end his days in his desert retreat, but when he heard the call from Jehovah to prophesy in Bethel, he bore with him all the courage and the strength with which as a herdsman he had rescued from the mouth of a lion two legs of a calf or a piece of an ear. Like Moses, he had lived so long with nature that he had acquired something of her simplicity. In strength and in vividness his writings are second only to those of Isaiah. The style of the Book of Amos "preserves all the effects of pointed and dramatic delivery, with that breath of lyrical fervour which lends a special charm to the highest Hebrew oratory."

A Rugged Seer in a City of Culture

Amos went from Tekoa to prophesy in Bethel about 760 A. D. In less than twoscore years the Northern Kingdom was to fall, but just before the crash she was enjoying the highest prosperity of her history, partly because she was at peace with the world. For a time Syria was leaving her alone, and Assyria had not yet begun to seem a menace. Under Jeroboam II Israel was increasing yearly in power at home and in prestige abroad, but the blessings of her prosperity were not equally distributed or wisely used. The rich were building summer houses, and winter palaces of ivory, in which they were lolling on the silken cushions of their couches, and all the while they were exploiting the poor. "They have sold the righteous for a pair of shoes. They pant after the dust on the heads of the poor." Needless to say, immorality stalked everywhere, unabashed.

This godless nation gave a prominent place to formal religion, which centered in Bethel, the seat of a high place, that is, a place for idolatrous worship, other than Jerusalem. In Bethel and in Dan, Jeroboam I had set up the two high places, as the twin foci round which the religious life of the Northern Kingdom

should revolve, but for some reason Bethel had drawn to itself many of the patrons of Dan. Although not the political capital, which was located at Samaria, Bethel seems to have been the largest and strongest city of the Northern Kingdom. Here the priests and the prophets, as well as many others who craved the consolations of an easy-going faith, must have made their homes; and to this popular shrine still other hosts must often have journeyed to seek the solace of a system which would not frown upon their sins.

The religion of Bethel was "baptized paganism." Its worship was splendid, costly, hollow. Even when offered in honour of Jehovah rather than of Baal, it was offered in a forbidden place and in a forbidden manner; hence it had no uplifting effect upon men's lives; indeed it fostered every sort of physical and moral uncleanness. Surely Bethel needed a prophet, but no less surely was she unconscious of her need. This was the one place, nevertheless, where the prophet could best speak the word of the Lord to Israel.

Amos seems to have arrived in Bethel on a feast day, when ritualism and patriotism united in ministering to the emotions of the throng. When he began to speak, he must

have caused something of a commotion, for he was a son of Judah, twin sister to Israel and her keenest rival. He must have been garbed in rough apparel, and have spoken in a rugged fashion which would shock the delicate sensibilities of Bethel, whose prophets were men of the mode. Think of Mr. Sunday in Boston! How could such a herdsman from the hated hills of Judah secure a hearing in the religious capital of Israel, on a day set apart to godless mirth? Would he at once launch forth against the sins of Israel? No! He began to speak in a vein which would have done credit to a skilled diplomat.

Like the modern missionary, who refrains from unnecessarily antagonizing the most sinful hearers, Amos began with truths which his hearers gladly received. He began by denouncing the sins of the enemies and rivals of Israel, and he massed his material in the most dramatic fashion. He began with Syria, and as he denounced the sins of one rival nation after another, he came closer and closer home, until his hearers must have been almost beside themselves in gloating over the doom which was about to fall upon their ancestral foes. From Syria, that hated neighbour of Israel, the prophet turned his rebuke against

the Philistines, and then against Tyre, both of which were Israel's constant rivals in commerce and frequent foes in war.

Amos must have come closer still to the hearts of Israel when he began to speak against the sins of the nations which were bound to her by ties of blood. A nation's worst foes are those of her own household. After denouncing in righteous wrath the barbarous sins of Edom, of Ammon and of Moab, the prophet must have amazed them all by turning his fiery speech against his own fatherland, Judah, which was perhaps the most hated of all Israel's foes, because closest in ties of blood. "I will send a fire upon Jerusalem, and it shall devour the palaces thereof." But beware, people of Bethel, before you receive this prophet with open arms, for he has not yet finished his message to you! He has pictured the sins of your ancestral foes, and the doom which will soon fall upon them unless they repent, but all the while he has been coming closer and closer to your own door, against which the storm is soon to break. Are you certain that all is well in Israel?

"For three transgressions of Israel, yea for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof." This refrain, which had sounded so

sweet when spoken concerning their foes, must have struck terror to the hearts of the people who were thus brought face to face with their own sins. But what could they say? They had acknowledged the justice of Jehovah in punishing their foes, who had been guilty most largely of the sins of barbarism; but the prophet quickly proved to them that they had been guilty of the more dastardly sins of civilization, such as the hoarding of ill-gotten gain, the exploiting of the poor, and the masking of sin under the garb of religion.

I. The Sins of the State

The first portion of this book (Chaps. i.–iv. 3) deals most largely with the State. After securing his hearing, and at the same time sketching his background, Amos began to speak directly to Israel. What could this provincial prophet from the South know about statecraft in the North? He soon proved that he saw more clearly than all the wise men of Israel, for beneath the surface of their prosperity he saw such weakness as invited doom. He saw that the nation could not long endure, unless it ceased to plunder the worthy poor and to befriend the idle rich. Before the so-called statesmen had begun to suspect their most

deadly menace, this prophet told them that their hollow glory would soon fade away at the coming of Assyria.

Amos was no mere politician. He was a spiritual statesman, a seer. He spake only as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. He saw that the basis of the state was religion, and that continued ingratitude, such as Israel had shown, would cause withdrawal of Jehovah's favour. The people of Israel were assuming that because Jehovah had always blessed them, therefore He would continue to bless, but Amos taught them that when Jehovah gave large blessings to a nation, He expected large spiritual returns, and that He would hold Israel to a more strict account than any of her less favoured rivals. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities."

The people of Israel seem to have thought that Jehovah was a sort of tribal deity, who would favour them no matter what they might do, because they belonged to Him, just as many a foolish father spares his wandering boy from the discipline which would recall him to virtue's narrow path. Perhaps they told themselves that they must be fairly good, or He would not keep pouring out His blessings upon

them. But Amos told them bluntly that Jehovah had blessed them bountifully in order that they might live in righteousness, and that their abuse of His mercies would lead only to judgment.

II. The Sins of the Church

The second portion of this book (Chaps. iv. 4–vi.) deals most largely with religion and the Church. Amos would never have dreamed of such a division as this, for in his time there was no such separation of State and of Church as there is to-day, but for convenience we may slightly adapt his message to our own conditions. We who love the Church can understand how the people of Israel must have felt when this alien herdsman began to say harsh things against their splendid worship. It was bad enough for him to find fault with their politics, but for him to suggest that their religion was counterfeit, was more than they could endure from any man, least of all from such an unattractive stranger.

When Amos spoke in Bethel, the State Church was probably more popular and more prosperous than ever before. Worship consisted most largely of forms and ceremonies, some of which had doubtless been borrowed

from the temple worship at Jerusalem, and religion consisted largely of ritual divorced from life; hence it had small effect upon private morals or upon public policy. In the Old Testament dispensation the true worship necessarily gave a large place to ritual, and to this Amos could not but assent, but to him ritual was only a means to an end, which was righteousness.

Righteousness is the dominant note of the Book of Amos. Our prophet would have been the last to decry obedience to forms which Jehovah had prescribed, but he insisted that such forms could be no acceptable substitute for righteousness. Jehovah is a God of righteousness, and He demands that His people be like Himself. Righteousness is the only foundation for Church and for State, as well as for the individual, and when righteousness is lacking, no amount of ritual can avert the judgment of Jehovah.

Judgment is another key-note of Amos, as it is of Isaiah. Once and again Amos broke out against Israel in this sad refrain—"'Yet have ye not returned unto Me,' saith Jehovah." God had been good to them, but His goodness had not led them to repentance; He had sent upon them chastisements of various sorts, but His

chastisements had not softened their hearts. Since they persisted in sinning alike against their joys and their sorrows, He was about to visit upon them more fully the weight of their iniquities. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." This was a message to the people as a whole, and not, as we ministers often employ it, primarily a call for individual repentance.

In this book law and judgment give way here and there to the clear shining of love and mercy. Such passages are few and short, but they are bright. "Seek ye me, and ye shall live." "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live." "Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish justice in the gate: it may be that Jehovah, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Israel." But Israel would not hearken to this word of the Lord, and so she was soon to fall under the weight of her own sins. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!"

III. Visions of Judgment

The third portion of this book (Chaps. vii.–ix.) consists largely of visions, which illustrated and enforced the seer's message concerning righteousness and judgment for State and Church. The prophets employed these visions

for much the same reason that the Master employed parables and allusions to nature, and that we follow Him from afar by using object lessons. The visions of Amos impressed the people of Israel even more strongly than his direct rebuke of their sins, for they permitted him to proceed through the main body of his discourse, but when he entered upon his visions, Amaziah, priest of Bethel, soon interrupted him. For convenience we shall group all of these visions together, and look at them briefly, before we consider the interruption.

These visions would be clear to every child who listened to Amos, and they should be clear to us who know a little about sacred history. The locust plague is well known to readers of the Book of Joel. The vision of fire is familiar even to casual readers of the Bible. Both of these threatened plagues were averted by the prayer of the prophet, "O Lord Jehovah, forgive, I beseech thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small." How galling for proud Israel to be spared because so small! Perhaps we may infer that the following visions were to be actually fulfilled.

"The Lord stood beside a wall made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in His hand." He was testing the work of His people, to

show them that it was untrue, and that it could not stand. It was fair to the outward view, but not pleasing to Him, who measured all things by His own standard of righteousness. In passing we should note that this vision proved to be the most exasperating of all; it caused Amaziah the priest to send word to Jeroboam the king, "Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear his words." So far as we can judge, the remaining visions were not uttered in Bethel; perhaps they were first made known by the pen of the prophet, after he had gone back to Tekoa to die.

The vision of the basket of summer fruits would have been far from pleasing to Israel. Instead of being sweet and luscious, as they supposed themselves to be, they were rotten at heart, and they would soon be cast aside. "'And the songs of the temple shall be wailings in that day,' saith the Lord Jehovah." "I will send a famine in the land: not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jehovah; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, and shall not find it."

The last vision revealed the Lord standing by the altar, bidding the prophet smite the capitals that the threshold might shake. This scene is terrific. "Though they dig into Sheol, thence shall My hand take them; and though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down." But even here, judgment is not far from mercy. "I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations, like as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least kernel fall upon the earth." The book closes with other bright pictures of the good things which God had in store for His righteous children.

In looking back over this message as a whole, we see that it was one of the mightiest sermons that have ever been preached. In style Amos was clear, direct, and powerful. If he was not always elegant in his diction, it was because his message itself was not pleasant. He drew his figures from the life which he knew best, and when he shocked the cultured folk of Bethel by comparing them to frightened cows which "go out at the breaches, every one straight before her," he was preferring truth to beauty. He was a stern realist, who saw things as they were, and painted them as he saw them, with none of the glamour which the idealist too often throws over vice.

IV. An Unsuccessful Preacher

When judged by modern standards, not as a work of art, but as an appeal for repentance and reform, this mighty sermon seems to have been a failure. By his strictures against the State, Amos aroused the enmity of the rulers. By his criticism of the Church, he provoked the hatred of the priests and the prophets. Probably he gained not a single convert. What a contrast to Mr. Sunday! Amos was not even permitted to complete his discourse, and if tradition be true, he was so maltreated that he crept back to his native hills to die from his wounds. "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . So persecuted they the prophets that were before you."

When Amaziah stopped Amos in the midst of his sermon, the man of God showed the stuff of which the seers were made. "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees; and Jehovah took me from following the flock, and Jehovah said unto me, 'Go prophesy unto My people Israel.'" He was no hireling prophet, like Balaam, no product of a "manufactured ministry," no peripatetic candidate in quest of a vacant pulpit. He was a man sent of

God, and while he had breath he would speak the things which he had seen and heard. "Surely the Lord will do nothing, except He reveal His secret unto His servants, the prophets. The lion hath roared; who will not fear? The Lord Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy?"

Amos has a message for us to-day, a message of which Mr. Sunday has too much of a monopoly. During the long centuries since Amos spoke in Bethel, conditions on the surface have greatly changed, but at the heart of things sin and judgment, righteousness and blessing, always and everywhere are the same. The most superficial reader of this book, who has even the slightest knowledge of our times, must see in it many dark facts which on a vastly larger scale find their parallel in every part of America to-day. To us in America Jehovah is speaking through Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities." "Prepare to meet thy God, O America!"

IV

HOSEA: THE PROPHET OF FORGIVING LOVE

HOSEA is one of the most winsome men in the Bible. Dean Stanley calls him the "Jeremiah of Israel." He lived in the time of Amos, when the Northern Kingdom was filled with sin of every sort, and his own dark experiences gave him a peculiar fitness for his delicate mission to his age. In many of its details his book is one of the most difficult in the Bible to analyze or explain, but as a whole it brings to us one clear, strong message about a delicate theme which concerns us all. Because of this difficulty and of this delicacy, the message is too little known.

The Book of Hosea deals openly with the sin and the problem of adultery. The Bible calls this sin, as well as every other, by its proper name, but it dwells upon such themes only for the purpose of making us purer. If we are to understand and to teach large portions of the Book, not to speak of such masterpieces as the works of Shakespeare, of Hawthorne or of Ibsen, we must learn frankly to face this sin of

adultery, and to speak of it with clearness but without suggestiveness. Surely there is a way for us in the pulpit and in the home to explain and to enforce the teachings of one of the mightiest of those books which are still profitable unto godliness.

I. An Unfaithful Wife

Here is the barest outline of the tale as it is told in the opening chapters. Gomer, the wife of Hosea, was untrue; in the phrase of one of the most brilliant expositors, Professor George Adam Smith, she was a "prodigal wife." She was not the ordinary harlot, such as one sees again and again in the prophets. They tell us much about the sin of fornication, especially when prolonged into a life of vice, and the Master adds to our horror when we stand in the presence of an impure thought. Hosea is far from silent about the sin of fornication, but he tells us that his own wife was guilty of the more deadly sin, adultery.

Gomer was habitually untrue to Hosea. Not only once or twice, under the stress of sudden temptation, but again and again, she sold herself to do evil, until at last she left her husband and her three children, of whom he was probably not the father, and flaunted her shame be-

fore the world. Lower and lower she seems to have sunk, until her paramour, sated with his lust, flung her aside as a thing of shame, and she was exposed for sale in the slave market. No one else seems to have been attracted by her, and her former husband was able to buy her back for the nominal sum which the law prescribed as compensation for a slave that had been gored by a bull. Such is a bald statement of the facts at the basis of Hosea's message, so far as we can reconstruct them now.

We have not yet touched the darkest problem of the book. It says that the Lord commanded Hosea to marry this impure woman! What might otherwise be a sad tale of marital infidelity, with its spiritual application to our own hearts, thus becomes a mystery concerning the ways of God with men. He is pure and holy; such is one of the dominant notes of Hosea's ministry. How could such a holy God command one of the holiest of His servants to wed an impure woman? There are in general three theories concerning this problem.

A few scholars interpret these facts most literally. They tell us that Hosea, purest of men, married Gomer, knowing that she was foulest among women; and that he lived with her for years as his wife, knowing from the

Lord that she was untrue. Aside from the problem which this interpretation raises concerning Hosea, it raises the vastly greater problem of justifying the ways of God to men. This unvarnished interpretation is repugnant to many scholars and saints, such as the late Professor W. H. Green, of Princeton.

Other thinkers, equally reverent and loyal to the inspired Book, regard the entire tale as an allegory. One of the most thoughtful Bible students that I know, said after hearing this tale as a transcript from actual life, that she had never dreamed that all of this actually occurred: without consulting the opinions of scholars, she had read the book again and again, and she had always supposed it to be an allegory. Such testimony is most valuable, for no prophecy is of private interpretation. When technical scholars and untechnical lovers of the Book agree in holding such an opinion, it is not to be lightly rejected. But the fact remains that this tale on its surface appears to be a sober account of actual occurrences, and that one who rejects it as a sober statement of facts, because these facts do not suit his theory of religion, establishes a dangerous precedent. If Hosea be an allegory, how can we distinguish truth in the Bible from fiction?

The third interpretation on which the present study is based, may be styled the retrospective theory. Let us suppose that Hosea married Gomer, thinking her to be as pure as himself, but that little by little, then more and more, he was forced, most unwillingly, to suspect her fidelity. He grew so suspicious that he gave to the second child of Gomer a name which reflected his fears, and to the third child a name which showed his sad conclusions. After a long while she left him. Sitting alone in his grief, he learned deep spiritual truths which made him a better man, and prepared him to become one of the noblest prophets of any age. Then he saw that it had all been from the Lord.

The Holy Spirit moved upon Hosea to write out for us his life tragedy, not while he was passing through the deep waters, for doubtless he had not then learned to view his sorrows as from God, but after he had planted his feet again on solid ground. Then he could see how all these things had been working together for good to him, because he loved God, and was called according to His purpose. Such an interpretation involves something of conjecture, although no more than either of the other interpretations, but it seems on the whole to be

the most satisfactory. Perhaps it will be more clear if we think of Joseph's retrospective view of his life, when he said to his brothers: "It was not you that sent me hither, but God." If Joseph had gone into details in a slightly different fashion, he might have created for us such a problem as we face in the Book of Hosea.

Assuming that the retrospective theory is correct, let us look again at the facts. Gomer's course downward seems to have been gradual. In her maidenhood she may have been so pure and so innocent that she would have blushed at the thought of such sins as she was later to commit; and if any person had dared to suggest such a future for her, she would have cried out for her men folk to avenge her insult. But in some way which we cannot even guess, the sin of impurity entered her soul, and so insidious is this most deadly of foes, that when it once gets a hold on the heart, it rarely lets go, but takes more and more of the life into its slimy embrace.

When Gomer was wed, she may still have been outwardly pure, or if she had already sinned with her body, she may have determined to live henceforth a life free from reproach. Hosea seems to have received the first child as his own, if we may judge from

the name, which suggests no suspicion; but not so with the second, whom he called, "Not-Pitied"; and he must have known that the third child was not his own, for he called it, "Not-My-People." Through all of this series of wrongs, Hosea seems never to have lifted his hand to avenge himself, but his heart had been wrung, and in later days he could write as one whose love had been stronger than death.

Hosea was ever guiltless of wrong-doing towards his wife. As a rule, where the wife is untrue, the husband has been the first to sin, but such is not always the case. Sometimes, as in Tennyson's poem, "The Wreck," the husband is outwardly true, but he is so preoccupied, so unloving, so unlovable, that in sheer despair his lonely wife throws herself away upon some poor wretch who still has a heart, even though it be filled with sin. But in the home of our prophet, the husband was blameless. Hosea was one of the purest men that our world has ever seen. No man with such a face as Sargent has painted could ever have given to his wife the slightest shadow of excuse for sin.

Such a shallow woman as Gomer cannot appreciate the love of such a strong, pure man as Hosea. Doubtless she did not understand

him. In "Vanity Fair" Amelia spurns the noble love of Captain Dobbin, until at last he turns away; and Becky delights in sin because it is sin. If in imagination we combine the defects of these two, we can guess why Gomer could fail to appreciate one of the most majestic men of the ages. A prophet is not without honour save in his own household.

Gomer could appreciate the superficial charms of showy, unreal fellows, who would lead her astray, ensnare her in toils which only God could break, and then cast her aside as "a thing for scorn to point her slow, unmoving finger at." To share the orgies of such as these, she could leave her home, leave her husband, and even leave her bairns, just at the age when they most needed a mother's love. Has human nature ever sunk lower than in the sin of Gomer, who sold herself to do evil? Yes! For when woman stoops to such folly, there is always at least one wretch who styles himself a man, and who lives only to make of her home a hell. But let us turn away; if we are pure in heart, we have suffered enough.

II. An Unfaithful Nation

Why should a merciful God permit a good man to suffer as Hosea suffered? Many times

when we watch the best man that we know being treated worse than a brute would treat his dog, we ask the old, old question—Why? But we forget that only a good man can suffer as Hosea suffered. If he himself had been impure at heart, he would have resented the affront to what a modern man styles his honour, and he would have rushed out to avenge his wrong. If he had been merely a cold, unfeeling husband, he might have taken refuge in the thought that he had never been untrue. But since he was only a humble child of God, he must suffer because of Gomer's sin, somewhat as God suffers because of our sin. Because Hosea was pure and strong, he could love Gomer with a love that passeth knowledge, and when he found that his love was not returned, but that it was rather trampled under the feet of her who was not worthy to touch the hem of his garment, still he could love and he could suffer.

In the midst of his own sufferings, Hosea must have learned to sympathize with other men, for he lived in an age and in a land filled with impurity of the blackest hue. As he looked out over his own threshold, where those helpless bairns were sobbing for the love of a mother who was worse than dead, he must

have seen other homes which sin had blasted, and his heart must have been filled with a new sympathy for the innocent sufferers, a sympathy born of his own sufferings. As he began to see the light again, he must have yearned to share it with all who suffered with him at the hand of sinners whom they loved. To sympathize means to suffer with, and for his gentle ministry as a friend of sinners Hosea was made more perfect through the things which he suffered.

Little by little Hosea must have seen a deeper meaning in his sorrows. Not only was he to become the sympathizing friend of others whose love had been misplaced, but he was to teach Israel that she was guilty of the sin of spiritual adultery. This figure startles us at first, but nothing weaker could convey the truth about an unfaithful Church, such as that in the time of Hosea. This figure did not originate with him, for it was the natural corollary of the common Biblical teaching that Jehovah was spiritually the Husband of the Church. Other lands which sinned grievously against Jehovah were guilty of fornication, but Israel and Judah, which had plighted their troth, were guilty of spiritual adultery. Nowhere did this awful thought find clearer expression than in the book written by this

man who had himself suffered somewhat as God was suffering.

Jehovah had ever been true to Israel. He had set His love upon her, and He had never let her go. "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms, but they knew not that I healed them." He had loved her with an endless love, and had chosen her for priceless joys, but she had been untrue; she had forgotten her Lord, and her course downward had waxed worse and worse. She had long since forgotten her first love for Jehovah, and had been captivated by the deities of other lands, especially by Baal. "'She went after her lovers, and forgat Me,' saith the Lord." She had led herself to believe that the corn and the fruit and the cattle had come from Baal, and not from Jehovah; and so she had sold herself to do evil, and all for something to eat!

The result of such spiritual adultery was inevitable. The next generation did not know Jehovah as their father, but Baal. They lived still in Jehovah's land, and they called themselves by His name, but they were not like Him, and they could not do His will. They became so vile in heart and in life that they lost the favour of the One Who should have meant more to them than life. They plowed wickedness, and

they must reap iniquity ; they sowed the wind, and they must reap the whirlwind. In no other way could the love of God lead them to repentance. In plain terms, which our prophet's figure should make all the stronger, Israel must suffer for all of her sins, unless she repent.

III. A Forgiven Nation

Hosea was the prophet of love, and such love as he revealed was ever waiting to forgive. At last the prodigal nation would come back, and would find Jehovah ready to forgive. From this lofty point of view we may scan the entire book, and find it in three great truths of religion, three truths as characteristic of Hosea as they are of the Apostle John. The first of the three concerns knowledge of God. "This is life eternal, to know." As Gomer had sinned against Hosea, so Israel had sinned against Jehovah, because she had not really known Him ; and when she came to know Him, because of the things which He let her suffer, she would return to Him with chastened love.

Here are some of Hosea's words about knowledge, presented without sequence or comment. "Jehovah hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land."

"She did not know that I gave her the grain, and the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied unto her the silver and gold, which they used for Baal." "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the understanding." "Ephraim is like a silly dove, without understanding." "I desire goodness and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." "I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know Jehovah." "My God, we Israel know Thee." "Let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord."

The second of these key-notes of Hosea is to return, or to turn, meaning to repent, and to be converted. "Their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God." "My people are bent on backsliding from Me." "O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto Jehovah: say unto Him, 'Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good.'" "Jehovah is His memorial name. Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep kindness and justice, and wait for thy God continually." "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness; for it is time to seek Jehovah, till He come and rain righteousness

upon you." "'In their affliction they will seek Me earnestly.' 'Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us.'"

The third mighty truth in this book is God's love for sinners. This word love does not appear so often as one might expect, but the spirit of love is everywhere in Hosea: like the salt in the sea, love here is in solution, but unlike the salt in the sea, love here deposits more than a few crystals. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him." But they "became abominable, like that which they loved." "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I cast thee off, Israel?" "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say unto them that were not My people, 'Thou art My people;' and they shall say, 'Thou art my God.'" "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall blossom as the lily." "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from death: 'O death, where are thy plagues? O Sheol, where is thy destruction?'"

The last words of the book give the sum of

the plea as a whole. "Who is wise, that he may understand these things, prudent that he may know them? For the ways of Jehovah are right, and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein." We might do well to cease here, and to let these tender, compelling words keep ringing in our ears as a call for us to repent. But we prefer to look back and to inquire concerning the fate of poor Gomer. Through her sin Hosea had learned to sympathize more deeply with the sufferings of God, because of His unfaithful Church, and so far as we can judge, through Hosea's deepening knowledge of Jehovah's forgiveness, he learned that he should forgive his own unfaithful wife.

IV. A Forgiven Wife

Hosea's forgiveness is almost without a parallel. When Gomer was exposed for sale as a slave he bought her back, and he took her to his home. He had never ceased to love her, and as soon as she repented, he strove to treat her somewhat as he had learned that Jehovah would treat His penitent Church. Alas for Gomer, never on earth would she become such a wife and mother as she might have been if she had not fallen; but at last she must have

begun to understand the great loving heart of her husband; and so long as she lived, she must ever have striven to prove herself somewhat worthy to bear the name of one of earth's noblest saints. One cannot but think of the contrast between this picture and that of Tennyson, where the King parts forever from the Queen. If Arthur is majestic, Hosea was almost divine.

A few years ago a minister who shall be nameless was sitting in his study preparing for his work on the Lord's Day, when a young man of humble dress walked in through the open door, introduced himself, and asked if a certain young woman was an inmate of the local Crittenden Home. That minister was one of the directors of the Home, but he hesitated to tell what he knew, because these institutions carefully guard the identity of each inmate, who is known even to her unfortunate companions under an assumed name; but when he had heard the tale, he said that the young woman was in the Home, and that if she were willing, they could meet once more, but only in the presence of a witness.

The minister hurried out to the Home, where he astounded the young woman by telling her of the lover from whom she had fled in dis-

grace. She was most eager for the interview, and it seemed best to the matron that the minister should serve as the witness. Only through him are the facts known, and they must not be told too clearly, for both the principals are doubtless still alive. For convenience let us think of them as Mary and John.

When Mary came into the room, John rushed to embrace her, but she held him away, while with sobs which she could scarcely control she told him that she had proved unworthy of her betrothal vows, which he had ever regarded as holy, and that she was soon to become the mother of a child begotten by another man; she wished only to ask her real lover for God's sake to forgive her, and then to part forever. But John would not have it so; he took her to his heart and told her he knew that she had been more sinned against than sinning, that she had long since repented, that she had found forgiveness, and that by God's grace her soul was whiter than snow. He told her that he loved her still, and that he had sought her near and far, to claim her as his bride.

At the first mention of marriage, poor Mary tore herself away, crying out that she was not worthy, that she was an outcast. But John would not let her speak against herself; he

took her again in his arms, told her again that she was pure, and that his love would never let her go. Little by little she yielded to the desire of her heart, and after the Board of the Home had given its approval, the minister united the two in holy wedlock. John secured employment as a street-car conductor in that city, where both of them were unknown; they began their life together in a wee cottage; and ere long Mary gave birth to a boy.

When I first listened to this tale, I thought of Hosea and Gomer; then I thought of God and His Church. When I learned how John loved Mary and her little babe, and how Mary adored the man who had lifted her out of the pit, I thought of God's love for His Church, and of the love which she should bear to Him. "Her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." Judging from our slack devotion, one would suppose that we had sinned against Him only a little, and that we felt the need for only a little forgiveness; but when we learn the truth from Hosea, and from the Christ for Whom he prepared the way, we know that we are guilty of spiritual adultery.

The sins of the Church are even more of a

sorrow to God than the sins of the world. We often say that the worst sin is unbelief, which, according to the prophets, is spiritual fornication; but we forget that it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. If we fall after the vows of God are upon us, we are guilty of a sin far more black than that of Gomer. Instead of throwing stones at her, and at weary unfortunates to-day, who are ready to end it all under the Bridge of Sighs, we should learn the horror of our own unfaithfulness, and repent, ere we become altogether abominable, like the sins which we love.

The hope for an unfaithful Church is ever the same: "Let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord"; "Come and let us return unto Jehovah"; "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely"; "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol, I will redeem them from death." Now abideth knowledge, repentance, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Such is the Gospel according to Hosea.

V

ISAIAH: THE PROPHET TO THE NATION

NO man in the Old Testament looms larger in the eyes of the modern world than Isaiah. "By the strength of his personality, the wisdom of his statesmanship, the length and unbroken assurance of his ministry, the almost unaided service which he rendered to Judah at the greatest crisis of her history, the purity and grandeur of his style, and the influence which he exerted on subsequent prophecy,"—by all of this and more, he impresses us as the greatest of all the prophets whose writings are extant. Whenever we use the word prophet, we think at once of Isaiah.

This man has well been styled the king of the prophets. Among all the gifted seers of the Old Testament, he stands out as the most versatile. He was "distinguished less by any special excellence than by the symmetry and the perfection of all his powers." He was a theologian, a statesman, a reformer, an orator, a historian, a poet, and more important still,

he was a man filled with the Spirit, as saintly as he was strong. As an orator and poet he was master of a style which for beauty and force has been the model as well as the despair of writers and speakers in all ages, and which for vividness of sustained imaginative flights has rarely been approached.

Isaiah was always and everywhere a prophet. Whatever the occasion and whatever the theme, he was ever voicing a message from God to the men of his day. He differed from other seers in the number and the variety of the fields which he entered, in each of which he was perfectly at home. Like Hosea, he was vitally concerned for the deepest spiritual truth. Like Amos and Micah, he was a social reformer. Like Elijah, he was a spiritual statesman; but more than Elijah, or almost any other seer, he had a broad vision of international affairs, and a thorough mastery of the spiritual principles upon which the state must rest. In the present study, which must be brief, we shall look at him most largely as the prophet to the nation.

I. The Man and His Times

The Book of Isaiah, strange to tell, is little understood. We praise it, but we seldom read

it. We know a chapter here and there, to which we often turn, but we do not know the book as a whole, or even any large portion of it. Many of us who pride ourselves on knowing this book might as well pride ourselves on knowing America, because forsooth we have climbed Mount Mitchell and Pike's Peak. Without some knowledge of the background against which the prophet stood when he pointed across the gloomy years to the figure of the coming King, we cannot comprehend his promises or his judgments. On the other hand, if we study these pages in the light of contemporary history, we may expect an increasing reward.

We know this man solely as he revealed himself in his writings, and that was but casually. We infer that he was of noble birth, that he was highly educated, and that he was a man of distinction in Jerusalem. We know that he prophesied in the latter portion of the eighth century before Christ, beginning his life-work about 740 B. C., and closing it not long after 700 B. C. We know, too, that he was married, and that he begat two sons, on whom he bestowed names symbolical of his twofold message: "a remnant shall return," and "the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth." "Behold, I

and the children whom Jehovah hath given to me are for signs and wonders in Israel."

"In the year that King Uzziah died," that is, about 740 B. C., Isaiah was called. The times sorely needed a man with all of his gifts and graces. During the long years of peace under Uzziah, the farmers had filled their barns to bursting, and the city folk, whom the prophet knew best, had learned to revel in all that wealth could buy. The few barons into whose hands the larger portion of the land and the gold had fallen, were using their power to exploit the common people. Vying with each other in luxury and in vice, the self-styled upper classes were running to every excess of riot. The women especially were deliberately calling attention to themselves by the gaudiness and the suggestiveness of their attire.

In the first chapter, which Ewald styles the Grand Arraignment, Isaiah showed that the root of all their sins was irreligion, and that their only hope was in returning to Jehovah. They would have said that they were intensely religious, because formal worship of every sort was flourishing: ritualism divorced from righteousness; superstition and witchcraft; even the foulest rites of idolatry. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but

Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." The worship of such a people was a stench in the nostrils of God. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widows."

The scarlet sins of the nation appeared again in the fifth chapter, with its figure of Jehovah's vineyard and its sour grapes, or Israel and her social sins. "He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry." Proceeding from this text, the prophet hurled five woes against the sins of Judah, and especially against those which flowed from strong drink. For example, drunken sceptics were scoffing: "Let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it." "For all this His anger is not turned away, and His hand is stretched out still."

In this same chapter the prophet for the first time pointed out the other peril which threatened the very existence of Judah: not only was she honeycombed with social and individual sin; but she was soon to face a mighty, unscrupulous foe, even Assyria. "And

He will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss for them from the end of the earth; and behold they shall come with speed swiftly." Even in our English translation this entire paragraph is worthy of study as a model of the art of wedding ideas and words, but it produced small effect upon the inhabitants of that "jubilant city." Much peace and prosperity had made them mad.

Judah and Israel were situated on the highway between the two great world powers, Assyria and Egypt, and Hebrew history might be scanned with interest to watch how those two tiny states strove to elude the clutches of one or the other of these two rapacious powers. Ancient Judah and Israel seem large to us, who think of their place in the history of redemption, but despite all their own estimates of their prowess, and all their hopes for world-wide dominion, in contrast with these two mighty empires they were territorially as insignificant as Holland and Switzerland in modern Europe. But Isaiah strove in vain to convince the nation that Assyria was only waiting for a pretext to swallow her attractive little neighbour, which was daily becoming weaker because of sin. All of this was close to the heart of his political message.

II. His Political Teachings

Isaiah was a spiritual statesman. He held no office, and as a rule he was spokesman for an unpopular cause, but always he was a power for political righteousness. He demanded that the nation return to pure religion, and that they carry it into every cranny of political life at home, as well as into all their international relations. He knew that his nation had passed the parting of the ways, and that they had chosen the path which would lead ere long to doom, but still he strove to prepare the remnant which would survive after disaster came upon the nation. His political teachings fall into three groups, corresponding roughly with the reigns of Jotham, of Ahaz and of Hezekiah.

During the first period, extending roughly from 740 A. D. to 735 A. D., Isaiah was ever picturing coming doom. Because of popular irreligion and lack of faith, because of luxury and vice, he foresaw that his people would quickly succumb to pressure from without. His descriptions of oncoming doom are among the most powerful in all prophetic literature. "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; and Jehovah of hosts shall be exalted in that day." In this first attempt to

avert doom, the seer failed, as he had known from the beginning that he must fail; but all the while he kept recurring to the comforting truth about the remnant. "And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy."

During the second period, extending roughly from 734 B. C. to 719 B. C., the activity of the prophet centered round the year 734 B. C., when his dire predictions were partially fulfilled in the joint attack from the combined forces of Israel and Syria (not Assyria!). In desperation King Ahaz determined to seek refuge under the outstretched wing of mighty Assyria. "His heart trembled, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest tremble before the wind." Isaiah went to him with a message from the Lord: "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither let thy heart be faint because of those two tails of smoking firebrands." The prophet warned king and nation to seek no entangling alliances, but to trust solely in the Lord: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

Ahaz did not hearken to Isaiah, but threw himself and his people into the waiting arms of Assyria, which quickly quelled Israel and Syria. Ahaz was weak and vain; so he could

scarcely have risen to the heights of faith demanded by the prophet. The people, too, with certain exceptions, had small faith. For a time after they sought protection from Assyria, they must have congratulated themselves on their bargain, but ere long they awoke to the fact that in escaping from relatively insignificant foes near by, they had thrown themselves into the power of the mightiest empire on earth. Repentance came soon, but it came too late. It grew stronger still in 722 B. C., when Israel was carried away into captivity, nevermore to return, leaving Judah alone to await her doom.

During the last years of the eighth century, and especially at its close, Isaiah entered into his most brilliant days. The proud people of Judah, who had long boasted of their independence, were growing more and more restive under the heavy yoke of Assyria, and so their leaders plotted rebellion, or sought a defensive alliance with Egypt. Isaiah, in order to meet the new needs of his nation, changed his message once more. While his nation had been free, he had pleaded with them to rely upon Jehovah, and to remain independent; now that by their own folly they were at the mercy of Assyria, he implored them to submit, until Jehovah should set them free.

In 701 B. C., the crisis became imminent. About ten years before, when the nation had been ready to break loose from Assyria, and to join forces with Egypt, the prophet had been commanded to go about naked and shoeless, as a token of the way in which Egypt would soon be stripped by Assyria; and for a time the people had desisted from their folly; but at last they were to have their way. Isaiah kept pleading with king and people to wait for the salvation of God. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." But the people would not wait for God. They doubtless suspected that Isaiah was in sympathy with their oppressors, and hence they must have listened all the more eagerly to the emissaries of Egypt, who bade them combine with other petty kingdoms in a conspiracy against Assyria.

All this while many of the people and the rulers, as well as many of the prophets and the priests, were revelling and carousing with the most amazing unconcern. In their drunken songs, over tables full of vomit and filthiness, they were scoffing at the oft repeated warnings of the prophet, and exulting in their godless alliance. "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we are at agreement."

"Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah . . . 'your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then shall ye be trodden down by it.'" The prophet told them plainly that the Lord would bring Assyria upon them within the year.

Isaiah warned them not to trust in Egypt. "'Woe to the rebellious children,' saith Jehovah, 'that take counsel, but not of Me; and that make a league, but not of My Spirit; that they may add sin to sin; . . . to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame; and the shadow of Egypt your confusion.'" The only response of the rebellious people was to cry out for smooth sayings! But the seer spake on: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek Jehovah! Yet He also is wise. . . . Now the Egyptians are men and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit; and when Jehovah shall stretch out His hand, both he that helpeth

shall stumble, and he that is helped shall fall, and they shall all be consumed together."

Once again Isaiah failed. Despite his clear, repeated warnings, Judah took the first, feeble steps towards freedom from the yoke of Assyria, and soon the alien hosts came pouring out from the North like a flood. The conspiracy loosely formed under the friendly eye of Egypt, with Judah as its ringleader, quickly collapsed, and the people who had been jubilant over the prospect of freedom, soon saw their partners in the conspiracy falling one by one before the Assyrian cohorts, which were leading Judah for their last and sweetest victim. "The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath seized the godless ones: 'Who can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?'"

When the people saw that the shadow of Egypt was helpless to save them, and that her strength was to sit still, they turned to the man of God, and they found him waiting with a message as reassuring as it was unexpected and undeserved. He had perplexed them by foretelling the coming of Assyria, as the agent of God to chastise His faithless children, but when the lion had come, and was standing ready to devour her petty lamb, Isaiah astounded his

people by the definite prediction that while besieging Jerusalem, Assyria would meet with overwhelming destruction from the hand of God. After this prediction, startling events followed in such swift succession that we cannot trace them here.

"Esaias is very bold." In his inspired philosophy, which is only a poorer term for his faith, there was no room for chance; no way for men or nations to overturn the will of God. Assyria was to be the agent of Jehovah in punishing Judah for her sins, but Assyria herself was to be rebuked. Just when she thought the victory was to be had for the taking, Jehovah was to put to flight the armies of her aliens. In the eyes of the people and the rulers, opened wide by fright and able at last to see the strength of Assyria over against the weakness of Judah, the calm seer must have seemed almost a fool; but his faith did not waver. When Hezekiah humbled himself for his sin in becoming a plaything in the hands of unscrupulous politicians, instead of hearkening to the word of the Lord; and when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, roused by the smell of blood, defied Jehovah to do His worst, then deliverance came, as the prophet had foretold.

"And the angel of Jehovah went forth, and

smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when men arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead bodies. So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, departed, and went and returned and dwelt at Nineveh." In these simple words the prophet describes the triumph of his life. After long years of apparent failure, during which the people had rejected his counsel at every crisis, and had suffered for their folly, he was permitted to succeed in the most stupendous crisis of all, and by his faith to lead his hapless nation safely through their first collision with a world power.

This triumph came at the very close of the eighth century before Christ. Isaiah was no longer young. So far as his ministry to the State was concerned, he had finished his course, he had kept the faith, and henceforth there was laid up for him the crown of righteousness. Tradition says that he was sawn asunder by Manasseh, who began to rule in 690 A. D. During these last years, according to another tradition which still appeals to conservative scholars as true, he wrote the last twenty-seven chapters of the book which bears his name. These chapters are among the most precious in the Bible.

Liberal scholars assign these prophecies to other hands in a later time, because they differ widely from the earlier prophecies of Isaiah, both in substance and in style; but such a difference may well arise from the changed outlook of the prophet, as Professor George L. Robinson has shown in his volume on Isaiah. It would bless us to tarry long with these closing chapters, and to let them speak to our hearts, but they have little to do directly with the State, and so we must turn away, with this call sounding in our ears—"'Comfort ye, comfort ye My people,' saith your God." Now, as almost never before, the world needs to know God as He revealed Himself in these closing chapters of the Gospel according to Isaiah.

III. His Religious Principles

In striving to disentangle the political teachings of Isaiah from his religious principles, we have been attempting the impossible; we might as well try to study a man's body apart from his life and his soul. As a result we should see only a corpse. In almost every quotation above, the entire context would show that the prophet viewed the most sordid political schemes from above, and that he approached the most prosaic problems of state from within,

as matters which vitally concerned the Spirit. Through such secular realities he ever strove to point men's eyes to the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah was no formal theologian. In keeping with all true prophets, he unfolded the spiritual truth which makes men free, but never without regard to the needs of his own age. In modern phrase, we might call him a practical preacher, ever drawing from his experience the truths of religion, and while they were still warm, applying them to the needs of the nation, but only as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. It should help us to glance back over the chapters from which we have gleaned a portion of his political teachings, and to look for the soil from which they sprung. Beneath all the varied political counsels of this prophet, lay certain changeless spiritual principles.

In the teaching of Isaiah, all history, and especially that of Judah, was a field in which Jehovah was working His will. "He also is wise." His power was unlimited, and His sway was universal. His character and His purpose constituted the one final reason why the nation should repent and should trust only in Him. Of this book as a whole, we may well say what has been well said of chapter x. 5–34: It is the "grandest exposition of the religious

interpretation of history that ever was written." The essential principles underlying this religious interpretation of history appear best in the sixth chapter, with its account of Isaiah's call, when he saw in the temple the majesty of Jehovah, the sin of His people, and the survival of the remnant.

"Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts." The majesty of Jehovah defies description, even from the pen of this prophet. It is closely allied to His holiness, a word which in the original appears to mean separation, distance, elevation. Jehovah is separated from sinners by a gulf which we can cross only by the way which He has prepared. In the phrase which seems to have originated with Isaiah, and which was ever upon his lips, Jehovah is the "Holy One of Israel." "The whole earth is full of His glory." Glory is a general term to set forth the character of God. It implies a heavenly effulgence, a light unto which sinful men can approach only as they seek cleansing from their sins. What glory is no tongue can tell, not even the tongue of an Isaiah.

The God of Isaiah was no Infinite Absentee. Majestic in holiness and glory, He was most deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of the world, and was ever at work bringing men

and nations into subjection to Himself, that in the fullness of time the world might see the consummation of all the forces which make for righteousness. As the channel through which He was to bless the world with redemption, He had chosen Israel to be His peculiar people; and so He demanded of them holiness, separation from the world, dedication to Himself. Because they sinned more and more from age to age, He raised up Isaiah to warn them of doom.

Doom is perhaps the most characteristic note of the first part of the Book of Isaiah, as comfort is perhaps the dominant note of the second part. At the very beginning of his ministry, he learned that the people would not heed his call for repentance, and that doom would fall upon them, "until cities be wasted without inhabitant, and houses without men, and the land become utterly waste." But the night which was soon to steal over the nation was not to be without its star of hope, for in the closing words of his call, he learned of that other truth which is almost as characteristic of his teachings as the note of doom,—the truth about the remnant.

The remnant was not the worst of the nation, as we might suppose from the modern usage of

the word, but the best. In the history of the Hebrews, as Dr. Beecher shows, the piety of the saints stood out all the more brightly against the black background of the darkest ages; and after the Exile, the saints were to survive, purified and strengthened for their ultimate task of preparing the way for the coming of the King. After the nation had suffered for her sins, those who had come to know the Holy One of Israel were to be restored to Jerusalem; and all nature was to rejoice. Higher and still higher soared such visions, until at times the bard sang at heaven's gate; but ere long he must descend to sound again his trumpet note of doom. The song was for the saints; the trumpet call, for the sinful nation.

Instead of pausing to show how Isaiah applied to political conditions this truth about the Holy One of Israel, about His unholy people and His holy remnant, let us rather turn to his loftiest teaching of all, that concerning the Messianic King. As we go from chapter to chapter, the majestic figure of the King looms before us more and more clearly, until in the second half of the book He appears as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. All of us are somewhat familiar with this truth in Isaiah,

and we can never know it too well; but we often forget that it grew but gradually before the prophet's eye, as the unfolding of the seed-thought in his call, and that each stage of this development was intimately connected with the needs of the passing hour.

The first Messianic promise, that all nations shall flow unto the mount of Jehovah, and shall live together in perfect peace, was given at a time when the saints were hearing so much about national sin and doom, that they might easily forget God's age-long Promise. The more specific prediction,—"A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,"—was given to a king whose weakness must have perplexed the saints. The historic setting of another Messianic prediction, uttered a trifle later, is suggested by the prophet: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined,"—and then follows the promise concerning the King with Four Names, and blessed with supernatural endowments, for a reflection of which men vainly looked at King Ahaz. "The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this."

Isaiah comforted the saints and rebuked the

sinful nation by showing that the lowly state of Judah, after doom had fallen, would prepare for the coming of the King. He would come forth as a shoot from the roots of a tree which had fallen before Jehovah's massive arm. And instead of the conditions which prevailed under Ahaz, the ideal King would bless the world with righteousness and truth: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." And in the days of King Hezekiah, when the nation was tottering, Isaiah revealed the only hope for the permanence of the kingdom: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste."

From the most casual study of such passages, we conclude that the Book of Isaiah is an exquisite pattern, in which the warp consists of spiritual principles, and the woof consists of political and social and other ethical teachings. Here the warp appears, and there the woof, but both are ever present. The warp is the more important, and perhaps the woof is the more prominent, but either one without the other could scarcely body forth the design of the master artist. At times we cannot catch

the design, but where we see it even dimly, we behold such beauty and power, such fitness to the needs of the day, and such visions for all time, that we long to learn still more of the truth as it came to the world through Isaiah.

IV. His Message for Us To-day

What lessons has this king of prophets for America? We might twist his teachings so as to correspond with passing events, and even with long stretches of the future, but before we proceeded far with such a detailed application, we should discover that "the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and that the covering is narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it." Isaiah did not tell us when the European war will end, but by his spiritual interpretation of the history of Judah, culminating in the Promise of the Messianic King, he unfolded the spiritual principles by which the Holy One of Israel governs His world.

The principles of religion are changeless, but the application of them to conditions to-day must differ from the application of them to different conditions to-morrow. Isaiah must often have faced the charge that he had changed his mind: in no two crises did he give

exactly the same counsel; he was ever applying changeless principles to changing conditions; and so he could never be a mere consistent traditionalist. He dared to appear inconsistent, and so must any man who would become a seer. Jehovah to-day is the same as twenty-six hundred years ago, our relation to Him should be much the same as that of the saints in Isaiah's times, and our hopes should center in the same Messiah of whom he sang; but our application of these principles to passing events must constantly change.

What have the lofty spiritual principles of Isaiah to do with modern politics? Much every way! "The powers that be are ordained of God," says the Isaiah of the New Testament. Church and State are separate, and neither is subject to the other, so long as each confines herself to her proper sphere; but surely God is ruler over the twain, and no less surely He has a holy will for the State as well as for the Church. If we in America accept the changeless spiritual principles which were partially unfolded by this prophet, and perfectly revealed in the Messiah Whom he foretold; if we follow men who seek the wisdom which cometh down from above, so that they may apply these changeless principles to changing conditions,

we may expect to share in the glories of that future of which Isaiah sang. But if we do not hear the voice of God saying to us, "This is the way, walk ye in it," we shall not escape from doom worse than that which fell upon ancient Judah. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

THE REBUKES OF MICAH.
(Chapters II and III.)

(Suggestion : Prepare two similar charts, showing his Promises and his Demands.)

VI

MICAH: THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS

MICAH was the prophet of the common people. He arose in the latter part of the eighth century before Christ, probably a trifle later than Amos and Hosea, and about the same time as Isaiah. The age of Micah in its smaller way was much like our own. A half century of peace had brought much of prosperity, but the prophet's eye could see that there were storms ahead. To avert these storms, or to guide the people through them, Jehovah raised up two men, Isaiah and Micah. The major prophet was a man of the city, born in Jerusalem, probably in a home of wealth and refinement. The minor prophet, so styled because his extant writings are brief, was born in a village, in a lowly home, and probably he died as he lived, a poor man.

The messages of these two men differed far. Isaiah was gifted with a wider outlook and a

broader sympathy, so that he could scan the field of world politics; whereas Micah, equally inspired, confined his gaze largely to Judah and Israel. Isaiah could speak to his nation as a whole; whereas Micah felt most keenly the wrongs of his own class, the common folk. Isaiah, like Paul, addressed particularly the men of the city; whereas Micah, like his coming King, spoke much to men of the field. Isaiah was the orator, with wide sympathy, rich imagination and deep fervour; whereas Micah, even when he soared, went on a lower wing, and at times he became almost as rough as Amos appeared. What social message has this lowly seer for us?

The first chapter may be viewed as the introduction to the book. The prophet here seems to owe more than a trifle to that "Grand Arraignment" in the first chapter of Isaiah, but Micah looks at sin from his own peculiar angle. After pouring out burning words against Judah for the sins which shall speedily bring on doom, he voices his own grief that so harsh a message should ever be needed. Such is the ideal for the social prophet: plain teaching of sin and judgment, but always with groanings which cannot be uttered, and sometimes with tears which cannot be controlled.

I. Sins Rebuked

The remainder of the book falls into three parts, each of which consists of two chapters. In the second and third chapters Micah gives his bill of particulars, in support of his general indictment. The sin against which he set himself most strongly was that of oppression, and the first class against whom he turned was the unworthy rich. Like the Master Himself, our friend had no quarrel with the worthy rich, but he knew the peril of wealth, and he saw that many who were subjected to that peril quickly succumbed. He insisted that too often the worst citizens were not the wretched poor, who had everything to drag them down, but the idle rich, who had everything which is supposed to lift men up. Doubtless there were then as now bad men among the poor, but the proportion appears to have been greater among the rich.

The specific sin of these idle rich was oppression of the poor. Let us not style it a crime, for it seems not to have been counted an offense against the laws of man. Some social ills are crimes; all are sins. They oppressed the common people, who alone were weak enough to submit. Prosperity, due in large measure to long years of peace under Uzziah, had brought increase of trade, and

this increase had led to swollen fortunes. The newly rich, then as now, became infatuated with their sudden fortune, and became greedy for still more gain. There appears to have been no Jubilee to restore the land to its rightful owners, and so the source of national wealth, the soil, appears to have been shifting faster and faster into the hands which needed it least and would manage it worst. This was only one of the sins of the idle rich.

These unworthy rich could have done little if they had not been aided by the rulers, whom God had ordained to safeguard the rights of the common people. Like his more famous contemporary, Micah made no charge against King Hezekiah, who seems to have been almost helpless in the hands of unscrupulous subordinates. These nobles, weakened by daily indulgence in many vices, amenable to bribes and even courting them, had neither the power nor the desire to curb the growing rapacity of the idle rich. Micah compared such exploitation of the poor to a cannibal feast. No milder term could express the horrible truth. In the sight of God, ignorant barbarians who killed their foes in battle and lived on their flesh, were less guilty than so-called cultured classes who feasted on the blood of God's suffering poor.

Such oppression is always to be traced at last to the door of the Church. Here in Micah is the age-long trinity of evil: the idle rich, the unworthy ruler, the false prophet; and the worst of these is the false prophet. Living on the bounty of the idle rich, basking in the favour of the corrupt nobility, the false prophet found it easy to justify the wicked for a reward, to wink at their vices, and to share in their cannibal feasts. He was an expert in the gentle art of soothing the troubled conscience, including his own, without causing anguish for sin; and like Balaam of old, he could bolster up an unspeakable cause by appearing to give it the sanction of Almighty God. Is it any wonder that our prophet, himself doubtless the victim of social and industrial wrong, cried out against prostitution of his holy calling? This ghastly triumvirate is ever with us, and if we sit with voices dumb, while all about us the poor are crying out beneath burdens too heavy for the children of men to bear, we shall not escape God's righteous judgment.

II. Blessings Promised

The fourth and fifth chapters contain glowing promises, largely for the common folk.

Micah was no mere prophet of judgment, no destructive critic, no pessimist, to whom one could say with Homer—"Prophet of evil, never yet hadst thou a cheerful word for me; to mark the signs of coming evil is thy chief delight; good dost thou ne'er foretell, nor bring to pass." Perhaps the most of us who are striving to correct the ills of the world are failing because we are working without hope and without a song. We are prophets of gloom, but the true social prophet is ever a seer. After leading his people for a time through the shadows, Micah brought them out suddenly into a large, bright place, where the atmosphere was new and strange. He predicted a coming day when conditions should be reversed, when there should be a flood of blessings for the common folk, not for them alone, but since they had been suffering most, they were most to enjoy their new freedom.

The first blessing of the golden age was to be peace, world-wide and perpetual peace. This promise is almost the same as that in Isaiah, but even if Micah quoted from his elder brother, he gave the promise a new emphasis: the blessings of peace were to be largely for the common folk. This promise might be rep-

resented for childlike folk by the figure of a star: religion, which is another name for peace, was to become world-wide; the nations of the earth, instead of submitting their disputes to the unjust decision of the sword, were to choose Jehovah as their Arbitrator; they were to cease preparing to fight; they were to cease actual fighting; and they were even to cease training their children to fight. Such peace was to be a wonderful gift of God's love. This humble prophet has a message for the world to-day. Has the Christian religion yet risen to the height where one can say that civilization is a synonym for peace? Ah, No! And when a modern prophet, such as Mr. Wilson, dares to proclaim the gospel of peace, the world scoffs at the dreamer.

Our humble friend placed his finger upon a dark truth too much neglected in this age when the powers are rushing blindly towards bankruptcy. In war those suffer most who are least able to suffer, and in peace those should profit most who have least to lose in war. In war the rich may thrive, and at the worst they can retain a shadow of existence; but what of the poor? We must draw the curtain over their sufferings, but not before we learn from Micah, and from his Lord, that the only way to insure

the blessings of peace is to cease from war and from preparations for war. In this coming prosperity, made possible by the blessing of God upon an age so loving that it shall cease from war, blessings are to be equitably distributed. It is not for us in the pulpit, more than for our friend of old, to become judges over these matters of pure economics, but it is for us, as it was for him, a sacred duty to insist that there is a fair system for distributing the fruits of man's toil, and that men shall not rest until they have found that fair system, and have followed it to its blessed end.

Christian men everywhere are seeking to solve this problem, and strange to tell, the wisest thinkers of our time have led us to the point where Micah leaves us, namely, that every toiler should have a home of his own, not a mansion and not a hovel, but a home, with modest comforts and absolute privacy; and that he should have leisure in the cool of the day, after every reasonable task has been well done, to sit at ease under his own vine and fig tree. In modern phrase, to every man who does his best, whether he earns his way or not, society owes a comfortable living, and an outlook upon the higher life. Such a man is not poor. He is no industrial slave. There is

no one to make him afraid: no idle rich to browbeat him, no corrupt ruler to entice from him his liberty, no false prophet to justify his oppressor for a reward.

Peace and prosperity! What could do more for the common people? Almost nothing here below, we all agree, but with a sigh we exclaim that even if this golden dream came true, the common folk would not be worthy. But our humble prophet, like our Lord, cherished for the average man a far higher respect than we can muster, as we learn from Micah's last blessing, the greatest of all, the one which is to make the others possible. Peace and prosperity were to depend upon the progress of Zion, and that was to depend upon a Person. King Hezekiah might be powerless to relieve the oppressed, but One mightier by far than he was to arise, the One Whom we know as the Christ.

The Messiah was to be of rustic and popular origin. This truth is so familiar to us that we have ceased to wonder, but it would impress us more if we remembered that the most definite prediction of this lowly origin came through the prophet of the common people. The wise men whom Herod consulted about the birthplace of the Christ quoted from memory Micah

v. 2. The other side of the truth,—that the King was to be the Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace,—might well come through Isaiah, the noble son of Jerusalem; but when the Spirit wished to point men's eyes towards Bethlehem, He spoke through Micah. The prophet who hailed from a village somewhat like Bethlehem, assured his weary fellow toilers that the coming Messiah, even in His birth, would be one of themselves. The social prophet of to-day finds in this same truth his surest comfort for the woes of the oppressed. "The poor have the Gospel preached to them."

This coming child of a little town was not to be merely a second Micah, grieved at the wrongs of the world, but powerless to right them. Ah, No! the coming One was to be a King! "His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. . . . And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah His God; and they shall abide, for now shall He be great unto the ends of the earth. And this Man shall be our peace." Too long have men been striving to persuade the powers of the earth to lay down their arms; too long have statesmen been striving to manufacture pros-

perity; now let us turn, as we should have turned long since, to the Bible, and we shall find that this Man, this Jesus Christ, shall solve every problem of society. Prosperity follows from peace, and peace comes through Him. Here is our social gospel, our only solution for the wrongs of the world. "This Man shall be our peace."

III. Virtues Demanded

In the last two chapters of our little book Micah turns to a still different phase of his work as an ethical teacher. He demands that the people, including his own class, shall be worthy of God's blessing. He does not curry favour with his own class by ignoring their weaknesses and sins, while he paints for them a charming picture of future blessings; he does not console them for present hardships by merely depicting the doom of their oppressors. Micah denounces sin in high places, and he pities suffering in low places, but he is just: he insists that the entire people, common as well as select, must undergo a change of heart. Jehovah cannot bless them until by His grace they become worthy. Here is a note which is absent from the call of many a social prophet, who wonders why he fails. He has no eye for the sins of the common folk,

and no vision to allure them towards the heights. Is not he, too, a false prophet?

The sixth chapter of Micah is one of the most powerful in all prophetic literature; it contains the heart of the social teaching of the Old Testament. The prophet throws his message into the form of a controversy, in which the mountains are called upon to act as witnesses, thus anticipating the teaching of Paul that nature shares in the evil wrought by sin. This device is not new in prophetic writing, but the emphasis here is unique. Isaiah and Amos have presented Jehovah in controversy with His people concerning their sins, but Micah presents Him in controversy with them concerning their so-called worship, which in the sight of God is sin. The true social gospel ever insists that formal worship is good, but that it is far from all of man's duty to God, and that alone it is worse than worthless.

If we wish to follow this controversy, we must watch the frequent changes of speakers,—a characteristic of Hebrew literature. Here is one division of this message, given as an illustration of the sort of work which each student of the Bible should do for himself. First of all, the prophet appeals to the mountains and hills as witnesses. Then Jehovah, speaking through

the prophet, expostulates with His people for their abuse of His mercies. The people respond with the pathetic query: what doth Jehovah require of us more than we are doing; does He ask greater sacrifices, and greater still, even the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul? The prophet replies, in one of the noblest passages of the Old Testament, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Then Jehovah speaks in strong rebuke; and the prophet replies, speaking now for the people, with humble confession of their sins, and speaking again for himself, with strong confidence, which soars at last into a triumphant song of trust.

Rising out of the confusion caused by our rapid transit through this mountain region, three great demands emerge: for justice, for manhood and for trust. In using such key-words, we must remember that the virtues demanded in this living book are loftier by far than any of our words about them. These demands came to a people who had been taught by a false prophetic school that religion consisted in making sacrifices, and that when Jehovah was displeased, it was a demand for larger

and more costly sacrifices. The people confused ritual, a ritual divinely ordained, with piety; they needed to learn that even a holy ritual, when divorced from a holy life, was a stench in the nostrils of God. Is there no call to-day for an echo of this teaching?

"What does Jehovah require of us?" On every hand one hears the eager cry. Men have tested the world's solutions of their problems, and now they long to try God's way, but they know not how. They know that religion brings rebuke for every sin, and that it is filled to overflowing with promises which culminate in Jesus Christ, but they ask how they can secure these blessings for themselves, despite their sins. "Shall we give up a little more time, a little more money?" Yes, perhaps, but peace lies not thither. "Shall we give up still more?" Yes, perhaps. "Shall we give our children for the work across the sea?" Yes, perhaps, but religion demands more than any of these, or all; religion is love for God and love for man, love made possible by the death of Christ. Such love finds expression in social service, and Christian social service is no more of a sacrifice than the fruit upon the tree.

On November 20, 1908, there fell asleep in the city of Cairo, Egypt, a man who for two-

score years and three had been serving in that godless land as a foreign missionary, and who during all those years had shown by life and speech the only remedy for social ills, even the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the relatives of this social prophet, the late Dr. William Harvey, father-in-law of Professor George L. Robinson, erected a suitable monument over his remains, with rare discernment they chose as an inscription the key-note of our little book,— "What doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Dr. George Adam Smith says that this is the greatest verse in the Old Testament, and that it is excelled in the New only by the words of the Master: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Let us look more closely at the three demands of Micah. First of all, as the bed-rock of true character in man and in society, is justice. In the homes of the rich were treasures of wickedness; in their places of business were unjust balances; in their mouths were lies to increase their profits; in their hearts was the love of gold. The greatest offenders were the rich and strong, but Micah called upon the people as a whole to learn the old, hard les-

son,—that Jehovah delights in justice. And lest men forget, he painted in unmistakable hues a picture of the doom certain to fall upon those who perverted God's bounty, a doom which was to include loss of power to enjoy the fruits of iniquity.

Rising out of this fundamental teaching about justice is a still higher call,—for unadulterated manhood. "The godly man is perished out of the earth;" the best of men is no better than a briar; the typical neighbour is not to be trusted, or the typical friend, or even the wife of one's bosom; the sons and the daughters in the home rise up against the parents; "a man's enemies are the men of his own house." Surely manhood then was rotten, and no less surely the land must suffer until this putrefying mass of so-called manhood was cleaned and healed, or else buried and forgotten. But how restore fallen manhood? By restoring the true religion of Jehovah. It is noteworthy that our friend demanded in his fellows the same lofty type of manhood which he had pointed out in the coming Messiah. "And this man shall be our peace."

The third demand, and the highest, is for trust in God. This demand is not phrased in hard, cold words, but couched in the most win-

ning form. In that verse which strikes the key-note of the book, the character which is pleasing to God reaches its highest expression in its humble trust. This is the spirit which made possible the life and work of Micah. In his closing words he assures us that whatever others may do, he will trust in Jehovah. And he pours out his heart in a song so tender and yet so mighty that one thinks of the sweet singer of Israel. He trusts not for himself alone, but for his people, the common people most of all, that they shall be guarded from every ill; he beseeches the Shepherd of Israel to feed His flock as of old, and to lead them tenderly in the way everlasting. He lays bare the secret of such trust: he relies upon the mercy of his God, Who pardons iniquity and passes over transgressions, Who casts the sins of His people into the depths of the sea.

Justice, manhood, trust; and the greatest of these is trust. What have these to do with social service? Everything! With such stalwart character on every side, social problems would lose their bane; without such character, no social program can raise the dead. Herein lies the fallacy of Socialism, and of many another proffered panacea: external conditions can never cleanse man's heart; but if a man's

heart is cleansed by God, that man will right the wrongs about him. First make the tree good, and then the fruit will be good. Such is the teaching of Micah.

IV. A Bird's-Eye View

Let us glance back over the long way which we have travelled together. We have seen our friend as the uncompromising foe of sin wherever he saw it, and in his time he could see it most in the highest places. But he was no narrow agitator, fomenting class hatred and strife; he had nothing of that modern spirit which delights in the poor because they are poor, and despises the rich because they are rich. He had the spirit of the Master, Who was no respecter of persons, Who loved both the poor and the rich. The fact remains, however, that Micah thought most tenderly of those who most needed sympathy and strength, the suffering poor; and that he promised to them blessings rich and vast, culminating in the personal Redeemer. Unlike many a social agitator, he demanded that the people become worthy of God's favour, and that they live in quiet, humble trust.

Such is a bird's-eye view of the message; let us turn back still further and bid farewell

to the man. In the olden time a child came to brighten a humble cottage; as his parents were neither wealthy nor famous, he must have begun early to toil with his hands; he may have grown to manhood with little of the learning of the schools. He took small interest, apparently, in world politics. In an age when religion was supposed to be almost wholly a matter of theory and of form, he concerned himself largely with practical piety, and yet in some mysterious fashion, he presented a type of practical religion which illustrated a broad and lasting theory never to be found by men who sought theory alone. Many who were noble and mighty counted him a failure, perhaps because he was one of the common people, whose wrongs he felt, whose dreams he shared, and for whose sins he wept. For them he lived; to them he preached; for them he would gladly have died.

Whose portrait is this? From a distance one takes it to be the form of Micah, but on closer view one beholds such beauty, such majesty, such divinity, that one is constrained to cry out—"My Lord and My God!" Let us not strive to trace too minutely the details of this resemblance; let us rather awake to the broad fact, and in it rejoice. Let us who

preach rejoice, also, over the way in which our Lord used this child of humble birth. With no such gifts and graces as were showered upon Isaiah, Micah has left to the world a body of the loftiest ethical teaching, and an ideal which is still far above us. If we go to our people in the spirit of Micah, we shall lead them ere long to the foot of the cross; and "this Man shall be our peace."

VII

THE FALSE PROPHETS: HYPOCRITES

THE downfall of Judah and Israel was largely due to the false prophets. Under this heading we might include those who promoted the worship of alien deities, such as Baal, but for various reasons we shall do well to think now only of those who professed to speak for Jehovah. If to a man they had hearkened to Him, and had correctly interpreted His will, they might have led their people out into righteousness and peace; but they were blind leaders of the blind, and so their people fell.

These false prophets of Jehovah were related to the true somewhat as hypocrites are related to genuine believers. It is possible that many a false prophet, like many a man whom we loosely style a hypocrite, was self-deceived, and that he lived and died under the fond delusion that he was a worthy ambassador of Jehovah; but it is probable that the vast majority of these men were gross deceivers, and

that they were conscious of no relation to Jehovah which could give them a right to speak in His name. Whether conscious of their blindness or not, they could never have been safe spiritual leaders.

The harm wrought by these men not sent from God was due to their number as well as to their treachery. As the nation gradually began to disintegrate, their number waxed greater and greater, until at times it may have exceeded that of the true. They attracted comparatively small notice from Isaiah, but they emerged into prominence in the writings of his contemporary, Micah. They flourished in the days of Jeremiah, and they received more than a little attention from Ezekiel, from Zephaniah and from Zechariah. Surely the nation which had been called to be holy was going to pieces, when there was in the hearts of the popular religious leaders more of hypocrisy than of genuine religion.

The false prophets came into their own after religion had become somewhat highly organized, and when the schools of the prophets appear to have become an accepted part of the national life. According to Professor James Stalker, one of the few modern writers upon this theme, the rise and progress of the false

prophets was in large measure possible because of the work of these schools, corresponding to our theological seminaries, where the finished product was a "manufactured ministry."

I. Their Independence of God

The main characteristic of these man-made preachers was their practical independence of Jehovah. The true prophets were men sent from God, and so far as they were loyal, they were absolutely dependent upon Jehovah,—for their holiness, for their call, and for their inspiration. But the false had no such sense of dependence. So far as Jehovah was concerned, they were free. "'Behold I am against them that prophesy lying dreams,' saith Jehovah, 'and do tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies, and by their vain boasting: yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; neither do they profit this people at all,' saith Jehovah."

As a class these men were not holy. Some of them were doubtless not openly immoral; they appear to have been guilty of nothing more flagrant than worldliness. If they were no better than many of their followers, they were no worse; and if their ideals were no higher, at least they were no lower! What more could one ask? With a low sense of sin

and of holiness, even though they might not openly offend against the letter of the law, how could they represent Jehovah, Who is positive in His holiness? "'Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets,' saith Jehovah."

The great majority of these men, however, were vile in heart and in life. Isaiah charged them with love of drink and of sensual pleasure. Zephaniah said that they were light and treacherous. Jeremiah was even more severe: "They commit adultery, and walk in lies, and they strengthen the hand of evil-doers, so that none doth return from his wickedness; they are as Sodom." What lofty ideals and attainments for men who were to be the guardians of the public morals! If the people had been holy, such men would have been a stench in their nostrils.

Because these men were not sent from God, they knew nothing of a call. Herein lay the secret of their lack of dependence upon Jehovah. "I sent not these prophets, yet they ran; I spake not unto them, yet they prophesied." Doubtless they imagined that in this respect they were on an equal plane with Jeremiah himself. They must have known that they had entered their sacred office without divine authority, but they may have thought

that the true prophet, whom they considered their rival, was equally without authority from above. Hypocrites are ever prone to believe that even the saints are hypocrites.

The false prophets knew nothing of inspiration. When Jeremiah complained about their smooth sayings, which captivated the hearts of the people, Jehovah told him something of their wiles: "They prophesy unto you a lying vision, and divination, and the deceit of their own heart." With no spiritual equipment for their tasks, and with no supernatural guidance or restraint, the poor fellows were driven to desperate extremes. At best their words were only echoes, for they stole the messages of their rivals, and like other plagiarists, they rarely understood the meaning of the stolen words, or applied them where they fitly belonged.

At worst these impostors were guilty of the blackest falsehood and treachery. To lie is always an awful sin; but to lie in the name of God, and to label that lie a message from above, is doubly damnable. This is almost, if not altogether, an unpardonable sin. Zechariah depicts the horror of godly parents who discover that their son is a false prophet: "'Thou shalt not live, for thou speakest lies in the name of Jehovah';—and his father and his mother

that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth." One is tempted to wish that such a fate had befallen each of these fellows early in his life!

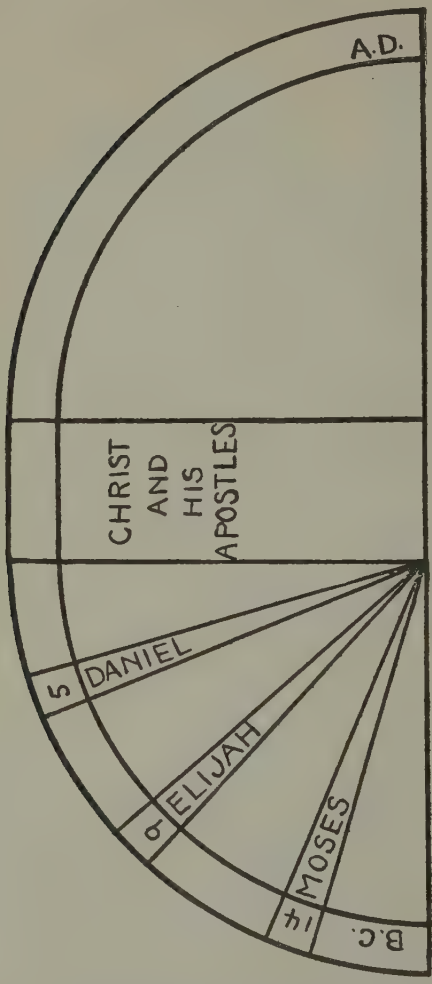
These imitation seers succeeded all too well, as the world counts success. They succeeded far better than the true. Why? Why should the people of God submit to such gross imposture? One of the true prophets lays his finger upon the secret: "The people love to have it so." They had the sort of men that they wanted, and the sort of teaching that they paid for. But even if they had desired a different sort of religious leaders, and a more spiritual sort of teaching, they might have had difficulty in detecting the false prophets, who were never without plausible credentials.

II. Their Credentials

In judging one who professes to come from God, man looketh on the outward appearance. There was nothing in the outward appearance of any true prophet which a shrewd impostor could not easily have imitated. True prophets gave relatively small heed to appearances, but imitators sedulously cultivated every aid to deception. Elijah, and perhaps others whom the people had learned to love, had worn rough

garments, and so their imitators in the days of Zechariah wore hairy mantles to deceive. They appear to have frequently resorted to ecstasy, also, and among a people easily led astray by superstition, the prophetic ecstasy, executed with consummate skill, must have seemed an almost infallible token of supernatural power.

What better credentials than mere appearances could the people have demanded? They could not have asked for miracles, because as a rule these were rare among the true prophets. If judged by the miracles which they performed, many of the true prophets would have fallen as far short as any of the false. Much the same is true concerning the fulfillment of predictions. We can test the true prophets in this way, but people in the age when these predictions were uttered could rarely know whether they would be fulfilled in the remote future or not. When Hananiah disputed Jeremiah's prediction that the captivity would continue for seventy years, and substituted the more acceptable number, two, events quickly showed that he was false. But the majority of these fellows must have been shrewd enough not to commit themselves to specific predictions which could be tested before they



THE FOUR MIRACLE PERIODS, OR CLUSTERS.

were dead. They were not seeking posthumous fame!

The most certain attestation of the true prophet was in his personal consciousness of a call from Jehovah. Such a consciousness would leave its spiritual impress upon every word uttered by the man of God; spiritual things are spiritually judged, and the people were forced to judge their professed seers, after all, most largely by the self-evidencing power of the truth which they uttered. When a man of God speaks the truth, the Spirit witnesseth with the people of God that he brings a message from on high. Such a test depends for its success upon the spiritual discernment of the people, and in the days when the false prophets flourished, the people were almost blind, and their ears were heavy because of sin. Hence they thought that the true prophet was speaking in an unknown tongue, and that the false was speaking as one of the oracles of the worldling's God.

III. Their Dependence on the People

The success of these men not sent from God must still continue to surprise us, unless we remember their relation to the people. Here again, they were wholly unlike the true men

of God, who were independent of the people, in the sense that they persisted in declaring the whole counsel of God, even though the people might implore them to cease telling the truth, and to prophesy smooth things. They could not serve two masters, and they chose to serve God. But since the false prophets were independent of God, they chose to cater to the whims of the people, on whom they depended for everything.

These men were good managers, and they were not averse to seeking great things for themselves. They looked to the people for a good livelihood, and they did not look in vain. Elijah, who depended solely upon God, lived upon meager fare, but many of these puny worldlings fared sumptuously; and save when they were poorly dressed for prudential reasons, they garbed themselves in gorgeous apparel. Micah said that the prophets in his day divined for money, and that they would prepare war against those who would not feed them. These good managers, who lived by bread alone, must have pitied the poor prophets who lived by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God!

These men were also good mixers. For their living and for their happiness, they were de-

pendent upon the good will of the people, and in common with other good mixers, they were adept in learning and in satisfying the wishes of their many masters. Perhaps these worldly wishes were seldom voiced in so many words, but there are other ways of impressing upon a good mixer the fact that if he wishes to stand in favour with a worldly people, he must be false to his conscience and to his God. Listen to Micah's version of these facts: "If a man walking in a spirit of falsehood do lie, saying, 'I will prophesy unto you of wine and strong drink,' he shall even be the prophet of this people." Isaiah tells us that the people say to the seers, "'See not,' and to the prophets, 'Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.'"

This feeling of abject dependence upon the will of a worldly people was due, also, to an insatiable craving for leadership. The true prophets were despised and rejected of men, partly because they would not pay the price of leadership. "Lord, who hath believed our report?" When King Jehoshaphat asked King Ahab whether there was not at hand another

prophet, the King of Israel replied: "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of Jehovah, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." If this prophet had been seeking preferment, he could easily have adapted his counsel to suit the ear of his king, but he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. "A man's duty is his king's; his conscience is his own."

The false prophets were handicapped by no such scruples. They aspired to become leaders in the National Church, with all the prestige and the éclat which accompany exalted rank; they chose with care the means most likely to secure their end; and they received their reward. In an age when formal religion held a high place in the public esteem, they became the recognized representatives of religion. Jeremiah speaks of them as the Fourth Estate, linking them with the king, the princes and the priests. Zephaniah connects them with the king, the judges and the priests. How they must have pitied such unpopular prophets as Jeremiah!

These men not sent from God were leaders only in name. Trimmers never lead. The

spiritual leaders of every age were the true prophets, who were so far in advance of their generation that almost without exception they were persecuted. Their rewards were almost wholly spiritual, and these did not appeal to the worldly hearts of the false prophets, who preferred a comfortable living and a flattering reputation. From the point of view of their worldly hearts, it paid them to be in abject dependence upon the will of a worldly people; it enabled them to lay up treasures upon earth. Their rewards perished with them, and to-day we think of them only with pity and sorrow.

IV. Their Substitute for a Message

If we do not yet understand how such worldly men could be regarded as the religious leaders of their land, we should study their message. No; we must not speak of their message, for they could merely echo the words which they had read or heard, and supplement these garbled half-truths with their own hopes and dreams. They were not sent from Jehovah; they did not know Him; how then could they speak for Him? They were in awe of their masters, the people; how then could they hope to tell the people anything which they did not wish to hear? No! Their message,

so-called, was only a policy. They were the heralds of worldliness, garbed in the vestments of religion.

Even when speaking about holy things, these men were politicians. In the speech of the true prophets, even when they were dealing with matters of the State, Jehovah was ever first; but with the false, even when the occasion compelled them to speak concerning Jehovah, the nation seems usually to have been paramount. Nowhere can we note more clearly the difference between a message from God and a consistent policy made up by worldly men. The true prophets give us satisfying views of God; the false, as Ezekiel says with scorn, muffle as with a glove His mighty hand. Even if they had known Him well, it would not have been good policy to let the people know the real God, for He was holy.

These politicians were far from being irreligious. Perhaps they talked more about religion than about all things else, but their religion was a matter of rites and forms. They lived in an age when ritualism had a large place in true religion, but only as a means to a spiritual end. These worldly men could not see the end, but they could make of the means an end in itself, and doubtless they imagined that they

knew much about God, because they could prate about sacrifices, and utter high-sounding platitudes in His name. What a pitiful substitute for the religion of the genuine prophets, who pointed ever and anon to the coming Messiah!

What could religious politicians know about the Messiah? Without a deep consciousness of personal or of national sin, without dark forebodings of personal or of national judgment, how could they understand the need for a Divine Redeemer? Without spiritual discernment, without an eye for the beauty of holiness, how could they comprehend the rudiments of the Promise? In these high spiritual realms, without inspiration, they could not take a single step. They could merely do their worst to make the people disbelieve the promises given through the genuine prophets.

The religious theory of these politicians was low and worldly, and their practical teachings were no better. For the individual and for the State they had no such ethical message as came through Elijah. With a low sense of sin, whether in themselves or in others, they could glibly speak "smooth things." They could know nothing save a gospel of "sweetness and light." Jeremiah says that they healed the

hurt of the daughter of the people slightly; they probed but gently into the surface of the festering sore, and then pronounced that all was well. Ezekiel says that they drew a nightcap over the eyes and the ears of the people; in modern phrase, one might call it a death-cap! If that people continued to live on a low plane, and if their morals waxed worse and worse, the blame must lie at the door of their so-called religious leaders.

These men had a definite, consistent policy for the State, and of course it was almost the reverse of the plan proposed by the true prophets. Isaiah, for example, pleaded with Judah not to strive to become a world power, not to trust in horses and chariots, not to seek foreign alliances, but rather to find her strength in quiet resting upon Jehovah. Such a high and daring plan for spiritual defense did not appeal to those worldly people, or to their worldly rulers, and so it did not appeal to their worldly servants, the false prophets. As Ezekiel says, the people were building a bad wall, and the prophets were daubing it with untempered mortar.

In opposition to such a spiritual statesman as Isaiah, these religious politicians encouraged the rulers in their determination to make Judah

a world power; in their age-long tendency to rely upon horses and chariots; and in their frequent resort to foreign alliances as a bulwark against invasion. From the point of view of the world, this policy was consistent, and in other circumstances, if carefully pursued, it might at length have brought the nation out into a place in the sun. But it could never succeed in Judah, which was the covenant nation of Jehovah, and if these men had not been blind, they would have seen that they were walking with their people towards doom. The evil which they encouraged lived on to blast the nation long after they were dead.

V. The Peril of False Prophets To-day

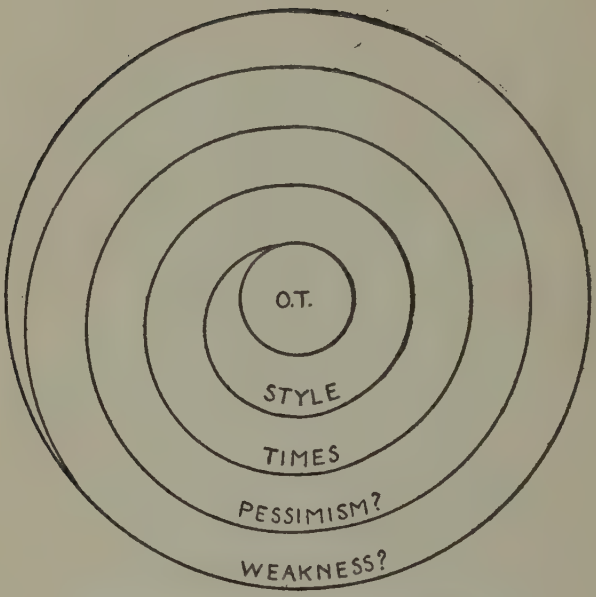
The spectacle of these religious politicians should cause us to beware of worldly men in the ministry to-day. Instead of using every known means to inveigle callow youths into this holy calling, we should rather insist that they tarry at home until they are certain of a call to preach. When young men enter our theological seminaries, instead of tacitly encouraging them to think first of the loaves and fishes, we should at once begin to hold before them the loftiest spiritual standards, lest the

modern Church be cursed with a generation of false prophets.

The modern Church is in danger of letting the world fix the standards for the gospel ministry. The world demands, first of all, that the prophet be a good mixer, and as a rule the false prophet could meet this demand better than the true. The world asks, also, for a good manager at the head of each congregation, and here again the false prophet would be more likely to please. The world insists, too, that the prophet be a good talker, and that he show an active interest in many things apart from his peculiar calling; here also is no barrier against a man not sent of God. But the world does not call for a man of the loftiest Christian character, and with the strongest spiritual message. Too often, alas, the world finds in the Church the sort of minister that it prefers, the false prophet.

The strongest temptation which comes to many a young minister is to strive to succeed by using the arts of the religious politician. Since our people wish us to be good mixers, good managers, good talkers, only this and nothing more, why should we not gratify their desires? Since they wish to hear only smooth things, why should we harrow their

souls with unwelcome messages from God? When we hear from the admirers of a most successful young pastor that he succeeds because he is smooth, we ask ourselves why we too should not prepare to succeed by cultivating the arts of the politician. To all of these queries there is only one safe reply: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" To-day as of old the true prophet depends absolutely upon God, and the man who does not depend upon God, no matter how gifted and how successful, is a false prophet.



CUMULATIVE CAUSES OF JEREMIAH'S UNPOPULARITY.

(Suggestion: Prepare a similar chart showing the cumulative reasons for honouring Jeremiah.)

VIII

JEREMIAH: THE PATRIOT AND SAINT

JEREMIAH has rarely been understood or appreciated. In his own times he was not in favour with the so-called good men and great; he was opposed by all classes of the nation, from the kings and the nobles, the priests and the prophets, to the common people, whom he loved most of all. To this day he is unpopular. We do not hurl stones at him now, but we neglect him, or we pity him, as though he were such a caricature of a seer as Sargent has painted. In an age when shallow optimism is all the vogue, we style Jeremiah a pessimist. In a land where tears are supposed to be unmanly, we call him a man of tears. We seldom read the book written by this so-called weeping prophet. Alike in the home, in the Sabbath school, and even in the pulpit, we rarely mention his name. In short, we live as though there had never been such a patriot and saint as Jeremiah.

In every age a few wise men have honoured

this prophet as one of earth's noblest heroes. Rénan, the French sceptic, who belittled other worthy men of the Bible, said of Jeremiah: "Before John the Baptist, he was the one man who contributed most to the foundation of Christianity. In spite of the distance of his time, he ought to be counted among the immediate precursors of Jesus." Many a more reverent scholar shares this lofty estimate. If it be correct, those of us who scarcely revere this man of God should ask ourselves why. We excuse ourselves for not knowing Nahum and Zephaniah because their extant writings are brief, but why should we be almost equally ignorant of a man whose one book is the longest in the Bible, save the Psalms? Why should we pity a man whose book comprises one-twentieth of the entire Scriptures?

Underlying our neglect of Jeremiah is the fact that his writings are found in the Old Testament. Many of us are slow to confess that these ancient oracles are to us only a name, but in our hearts we know that we have small understanding of these thirty-nine books about which the Holy Spirit said through the apostle: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

But still we must ask why we neglect this book more than the other long books of the Old Testament. Did the Holy Spirit make a mistake in allotting so much space to Jeremiah?

I. His Lack of a Literary Style?

We moderns demand that the books which we honour with our attention shall be clear, interesting, and at times even exciting. We prefer that our religious teaching come to us modestly garbed in the form of fiction, and that our religious teachers do our thinking for us in advance. We who are young prefer short, snappy magazine articles, rather than long, complicated treatises, such as our fathers loved to master; and instead of approaching this book with all the greater expectation because it covers many, many pages in our Divine Library, we view it rather with dismay, and pass by on the other side. If such a picture seems too dark (would that it were not true!), ask the young people of your own Christian Endeavour Society how many of them have read the longest Bible book composed by a single author, and with what results!

Those of us who still read our Bible book after book, in the good old-fashioned way, come to the Book of Jeremiah after we have been

exulting in the oratory of Isaiah. We think of the earlier seer as the world's supreme orator: with him we can mount up on wings as eagles; we can run and not be weary; we can walk and not faint. Then we plod through the pages of Jeremiah, much as a work of penance; and at last, with a sigh of relief, we turn to the Book of Ezekiel, where we begin again to soar and to see visions, not so lofty as those in Isaiah, but filled with vastness and beauty. As we turn from this portion of the Bible, we remember the Book of Jeremiah as a long, monotonous stretch of prairie land between the peaks of two entrancing mountain ranges. We think that we deserve great credit for taking that route once, and we trust that we shall not soon pass that way again. If this picture seems too dark (would that it were!), ask your friends of middle age to name their favourite books written by the prophets!

Many of us are tempted to conclude that Jeremiah is called a major prophet, not because he deserves to rank with Isaiah, or even with Ezekiel, but because he wrote much, rather than well. If we analyze this feeling, we find that it is due somewhat largely to Jeremiah's supposed lack of literary style. He had not the eloquence of Isaiah, or the ecstatic fervour of

Ezekiel. He left for later orators no models for moulding their periods, but he showed them how to adapt their style to suit their theme. He was the prophet of failure, of national subjection; he was called "to root out, to pull down, to destroy." He dipped his brush most largely in the darker hues, because it was not his lot to turn the hearts of his people towards righteousness, or to paint the glories in the distance. His style was scarcely more charming than the melody of Beethoven's Funeral March, because his sad mission demanded a somber message.

Jeremiah was led by the Spirit to seek force rather than elegance, and clearness rather than beauty. Call his writings dull, if you will; speak of the leaden wings of his fancy, if you must; but if you look beneath the surface, you will discover that his style has a quiet beauty all its own. The best writing calls no attention to itself; but if you are looking for pathos, where can you find it so well expressed as here? Save in the words of the Master Himself, where can you find more happy use of homely figures, such as the potter, the girdle and the yoke, the two baskets of figs and the broken bottle? Even for its style, this book is worthy of study and of imitation. If we continue to find it un-

attractive, let us beware lest false standards lead us astray, and close our eyes to one of God's greatest books.

II. The Man and His Times

Deeper still as a reason for our neglect of Jeremiah is the fact that we do not understand him and his book. "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and snatcheth away that which was sown in his heart." If we understood this book, somewhat as the original readers understood it, we should not find it dull or profitless. Without some knowledge of his times and of his life, we cannot hope to understand his book, or to find it helpful. Nowhere in our study of the Bible can we employ the historical method to better advantage than in the Book of Jeremiah.

We can learn more about this man than about any other prophet of the Old Testament. Unlike Isaiah, but like the Apostle Paul, Jeremiah was ever disclosing facts about his own personality and about his most intimate experiences. He tells us that he was born in the latter portion of the seventh century before Christ, in the village of Anathoth, and in the home of a priest, who was probably a man of

distinction. His name means, "Jehovah doth establish." He tells us that even before his birth, he had been set apart by Jehovah for the prophetic office, and that he had scarcely arrived at maturity before the word of Jehovah summoned him to take up his life-work. He seems to have been called in the thirtieth year of King Josiah, that is, about 618 B. C., and to have prophesied in Judah continuously for almost forty years.

Never was nation in more need of a prophet. Idolatry and vice, like twin leeches, had been sapping the life-blood of Judah so long that she would soon be unable to stand alone, and she felt compelled to turn for support to Egypt or to Babylon, the two powers which were then striving for the mastery of the world. To the degenerate Hebrews, Egypt, with her luxury and sloth, was more attractive than Babylon, with her energy and coldness. But God did not will that His chosen people should look to the land of the Nile for deliverance: He had raised up Isaiah to sound repeated warnings against that land which had often cast over the hearts of the Children of Israel some such spell as Cleopatra was later to cast over poor Antony; and through Jeremiah God sounded forth this message in its final form.

For twoscore years, as a "mighty statesman in the kingdom of God," Jeremiah strove to induce the rulers to abandon their schemes for alliance with Egypt, the waning power in the South, and to seek peace with Babylon, the waxing power in the North. For twoscore years, like the Evangelist in "Pilgrim's Progress," he strove to persuade his people to forsake their sins, and to turn again to Jehovah. For forty years, as the prophet of the Most High God, he strove to lead the priests and the prophets to cease their smiling upon idolatry and vice, and to reinstate in the land the worship and the righteousness of Jehovah. For forty years, as patriot and saint, with undying courage and devotion, he combatted the sins and the wiles of kings and nobles, of priests and prophets, and of the common people. Is it any wonder that he was hated and feared?

Jeremiah failed. He had been called to fail. So long as Josiah sat upon the throne, the prophet had royal support in his work of reform, and they two zealously strove to carry out the teachings of the Book of Deuteronomy, which had been discovered anew shortly before the prophet began his work. This reformation, however, was but superficial, and therefore short-lived. After 608 B. C., when Josiah was

defeated in battle by Pharaoh-Necho, and was slain, matters in Judah grew worse and worse. During the remainder of his life, Jeremiah was to catch only a passing glimpse of success. Practically alone, with scarcely a friend or a sympathizer, he was left almost single-handed to contend with his nation, blindly rushing to her ruin.

At last doom fell. After defeating Nineveh, Babylon conquered Egypt and Judah, besieged Jerusalem, burned the Temple, and in 582 B. C., carried many of the people away captive to Babylon. Jeremiah, saddened by these calamities which he had long struggled in vain to avert, must have yearned to end his days amid the ruins of his beloved city; doubtless he would have preferred to go to Babylon rather than to Egypt; but if we may follow an exceedingly doubtful tradition, he was carried away by wicked men who were fleeing to the land of the Nile, and there he was stoned. Whether this be true or not, he must have died as he had lived, solitary,—without wife or children or friends; but majestic,—a martyr for the truth of God.

Is this all that scholars and saints have learned about Jeremiah? By no means! If we study the Scriptures in the light of modern learning,

we should know more about this man than about any of those other seers. When we view him against the background of his own age, we conclude that he was one of the most winsome and most powerful men of the Bible. We behold him towering above the low level of his times, as one of those pyramids beneath whose shadow he may have died, towers above the sands of the Nile. Surely it is worth our while, at any cost of time and of toil, to become acquainted with Jeremiah, for to know him well is to honour and to love him as a patriot and saint.

III. His Reputation for Pessimism

A deeper reason for this seer's unpopularity lies in his reputation for pessimism. The men of his own time had no scruples against reading the books which comprise our Old Testament; they knew the historic background as we cannot hope to know it; but they had small patience with Jeremiah, partly because they considered him a chronic grumbler. Their heroes, as a rule, were little inclined to look long upon the darker side of life: Elijah and David were at times in the dumps, as John McNeil would phrase it, but only for a while; even Job was far from being a pessimist. Other

prophets were as unsparing as Jeremiah in their denunciation of evil, but somehow they left their thoughtful hearers at last with an outlook of hope; but in the eyes of the majority of the Jews, Jeremiah stood forth as a "pessimistic old man."

The modern world, also, thinks of this prophet as a pessimist. Partly because of the mournful tones of the Book of Lamentations, which does not concern us here, we use the term, jeremiad, to denote a "tale of sorrow, disappointment or complaint; a doleful story; a dolorous tirade." We view without protest Sargent's paintings, where Isaiah appears in all the majesty of young manhood, and Ezekiel gazes afar with a vision rapt and holy, but Jeremiah stands looking down,—aged, disconsolate, hopeless. We feel small desire to become acquainted with such a gloomy old pessimist. We forget the facts. Even if it were a crime to be aged, Jeremiah seems to have begun his work earlier than either of the others, and always to have retained the spirit of youth. He is called a pessimist because of the persistence and the energy with which he denounced sin and foretold doom. He hurled anathemas against his nation for her unjust laws in favour of the covetous; he likened her to a basket of figs

over-ripe; and he warned his people against impurity, which was swiftly undermining the home. But he found no delight in his message of gloom.

Most severe of all Jeremiah's strictures were those against his Church. That Church, like our own, was proud; she resented criticism or advice, especially from one whom she considered a pessimist. But Jeremiah persisted in declaring that the Church had largely forgotten Jehovah; that she had gone after Baal and Moloch; in brief, that she was a harlot. Such a message was by no means new, but not even Hosea had delivered it with greater clearness and force. Needless to say, no harlot relishes her title. The Church hated Jeremiah. She said, as many of us would say, that such bald denunciations of evil were altogether too crude for cultured ears, accustomed to smooth sayings.

Jeremiah did not cease, as many a would-be reformer ceases, with simple rebuke of sin. He proceeded to show the judgment which follows fast in the wake of evil. Again and again he reminded his people that they must not trust in soldiers, and that they need not look to Egypt for succour, because Jehovah was about to visit upon them the just penalty for their

sins. The prophet told them clearly that Judah would be visited by an avenging sword; that the Holy City, which they thought inviolable, would be set on fire; and that the people, who thought themselves the favourites of fortune, would be carried away captive to Babylon.

At the heart of all this sad teaching of Jeremiah lay an eternal principle: God ruled. God ruled, not only over Judah, but over Egypt and Assyria, and over the entire world. In many ways the seer proclaimed this truth, but in no way more strikingly than in his figure of the potter. As the potter moulded his plastic clay into any form that he might desire, so God was moulding the nation. Such teaching was scarcely more popular in ancient Judah than in modern America. We think that God is too merciful to punish His erring children, and that He loves our land too much to visit on her the penalty for her sins. Hence we do not relish the dire teachings of Jeremiah; we prefer soothing syrup, a gospel of "sweetness and light." "The world is too much with us." We listen eagerly to those who whisper,—"Peace, peace!"—when we should learn from Jeremiah that there is no real peace apart from God. God still rules.

"All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure;
What enter'd into thee,
That was, is, and shall be;
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure."

Browning, justly famed as an optimist, may have learned from Jeremiah the truth which makes "Rabbi Ben Ezra" one of our mightiest songs of hope. The prophet was no mere pessimist. He preached the gospel of things as they are, and as they should be. He denounced sin, but only that it might be forsaken, and he foretold doom, that it might be averted. Never for an instant did he close his eyes to the beauty and the joy of living. Here and there he painted a blissful picture of the coming Messianic reign, a picture which showed all the brighter against the dark background of his woes, a picture almost the brightest to be found among the prophets. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah."

During the Exile, after the doom foretold by

Jeremiah had fallen upon God's chosen people, and they had been carried away captive to Babylon, they began to view the prophet with other eyes. The fact that his unwelcome predictions had come true gave them assurance that his brightest promises would not fail. He had told them that deliverance from captivity would come at the end of seventy years, and at the end of those seventy years deliverance came. But, alas, Jeremiah had fallen asleep long before his people awoke to the fact that he was their best friend, the herald of their dawn.

For us, too, this book has tidings of hope and cheer. The entire Old Testament brings us no loftier message than Jeremiah's words about the New Covenant. These glorious promises were partially fulfilled in the return from the Exile; they found a more complete fulfillment in the coming of the Saviour; through Him they are being more and more perfectly fulfilled before our eyes; but the end is not yet. Why then should we neglect a book which has for us many gleams of heavenly light? Jeremiah was no pessimist; he was an artist, who painted his background on the largest canvas and in the darkest hues, but on this field he threw a flood of light and glory.

"Praise be Thine!
I see the whole design,
I, who saw power before, see love perfect too;
Perfect I call Thy plan;
Thanks that I was a man!
Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what
Thou shalt do."

IV. His Reputation for Tears

We neglect this man of God, in the next place, because we consider him a weakling. Michael Angelo painted a picture of Jeremiah as an "awe-struck figure," "in an attitude of hopeless despair." This is what many of us mean when we style him the weeping prophet. In an age when the adjective, strenuous, expresses our ideals of manhood, we dislike a weakling, a man of tears; and we think to ourselves that the men of Judah might have listened to Jeremiah if he had been more of a man. Before we condemn him, however, let us ask why he wept. Was it because of his sins? No! Of all of the men of the Bible, perhaps only the One stands out in more spotless white. When Jeremiah was called, he made no such confession of sin as that of Isaiah. Some one has said that in its pristine purity the soul of this gentle seer was like a sheltered lake.

Why then did he weep? Was it because men persecuted him unjustly? No! Like his Lord, he was too busy serving others to spend much time and thought upon his own troubles. He wept over Jerusalem, even as Jesus was to weep over that same center of ecclesiastical sin. There come times when the man who smiles upon his country's sin is a traitor, and when the man who weeps is her best friend. As six hundred years later Jesus was to stand almost alone in that great, wicked city, so Jeremiah stood almost alone. On every side were hosts of men who did not sympathize with his tears, because they did not feel the awful weight of their sins, and the fearfulness of their fast coming doom. They pointed at him the finger of scorn, because they did not know that his heart was breaking, not because of his own sufferings, but because of their sins.

We think of a man of tears as a coward, but a coward never yet has dared to become a reformer. For twoscore years, in spite of assured failure, Jeremiah persisted in his work of reform, and while at times he may have grown weary in well-doing, he never ceased in his struggle for truth and righteousness. Never did he flinch under the persecutions which men heaped upon him. When priests and prophets

and common people conspired to take his life, this sensitive soul, who had a world of tears for his dying nation, had not one tear for himself. On the way to expected martyrdom, he warned his persecutors to flee from the wrath to come: "Amend your ways, and obey the voice of the Lord your God. . . . As for me, behold, I am in your hands . . . do with me as seemeth good unto you." Is this the voice of an effeminate weakling?

In nothing was Jeremiah more like Jesus than in his tears. As Jesus was to weep at the grave of Lazarus, so Jeremiah wept over the body of his friend, Josiah the King; and the men who beheld the prophet in tears must have exclaimed, as their children were to exclaim at the sight of Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, "Behold how He loved him!" Do we think of Jesus as a weakling, because He shed tears when His heart was deeply moved? No! Why then should we pity this other man, whose heart when filled with grief overflowed in tears? If a strong man weeps when he buries an earthly friend, how much more will a strong man weep when he pronounces doom upon his beloved fatherland. Jeremiah stood beside the grave which for ages his nation had been digging for herself; and he saw ever at

the door the feet of those who were waiting to carry to that grave the nation which he loved more than all else, save his God. If he had not wept, he would not have been human, to say nothing of his being holy.

V. A Type of Christ

We neglect this man, in the last place, because we forget that he was a type of Christ. A modern scholar draws a parallel between Jeremiah and Savonarola. Shortly before the latter was burned at the stake in the convent church of St. Mark's, in Florence, he said to the people: "If you ask me in general as to the issue of this struggle, I answer, 'Victory!' If you ask me in a particular sense, I answer, 'Death!' The Master, when He has used a hammer, throws it away; so He did with Jeremiah, whom He caused to be stoned at the end of his ministry. But Rome will not put out this fire, and if it be put out, God will light another; and indeed it is already lighted everywhere, only they perceive it not."

There was much in common between the old-time saint and the modern patriot, but there was more by far in common between Jeremiah and Jesus Christ. If we fail to see this likeness, it must be because we do not understand

the saintly seer who "knew the fellowship of His sufferings," or because we forget that while on earth the Lord of Glory was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Yes, Jeremiah was like Jesus Christ. Conservative scholars call him a type, and liberal scholars sometimes speak of him as an adumbration, whatever that may mean, but all agree that he is like Christ. Surely this in itself is more than a sufficient reason why we should yearn after a closer walk with Jeremiah.

This man of God was like the Master in his teachings. Each appeared at a crisis in the history of Judah, which was never again to be the same; each was called a destructive teacher; each was hated because he foretold the passing of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and the ruin of Judah; and, needless to say, the predictions of each were fulfilled. But, as we too often forget, Jeremiah and Jesus were alike in their positive teachings, for which their so-called destructive teachings merely paved the way. For example, whenever we read that phrase, "New Testament," which ought rather to be translated, "New Covenant," we should remember that in the Old Testament it was first employed by Jeremiah. He foretold the institution of the New Covenant, and Jesus

Christ brought to the world the blessings of that New Covenant.

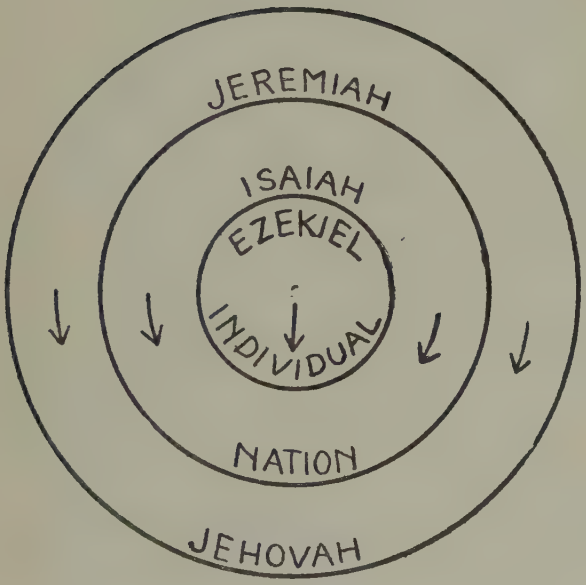
In Jeremiah, as in our Master, the man was even more important than the message. The man Jeremiah was like the man Jesus Christ. Sometimes we wonder why this prophet rarely referred to the coming Messiah. Perhaps it was because Jeremiah was raised up to lead a prophetic life: he himself was a living prediction of the Messiah. In Isaiah's portrait of the "Suffering Servant of Jehovah," written prophecy had already gone as high as it could go, and it remained for Jeremiah to embody that ideal in a prophetic life. Some of the liberal scholars, in casting about for a later seer great and good enough to have been the author of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, ascribe it to Jeremiah, because in a purely human sense his life illustrated many of those gracious words.

Like our Saviour, Jeremiah was sanctified for his life-work from his mother's womb; each was celibate, though each loved the joys of home; and each was unpopular. In an age when we almost worship popularity, we can scarcely comprehend why a discerning man should set his face like a flint, and deliberately choose a path filled with misunderstanding and

abuse. More than once Jeremiah was mobbed and almost massacred. His experience in his home village was like that of Jesus in Nazareth. "The prophet is not without honour, save in his own country." Each was rejected at Jerusalem; each was persecuted by the consent of his State; each bore the hatred of his Church; and each suffered death at the hands of those whom he had lived to bless.

This prophet was most like the Saviour, perhaps, in his sympathy. Isaiah, to the depths of his great heart, sympathized with his nation; Ezekiel, more than almost any other Old Testament prophet, sympathized with the individual soul struggling towards the light; Jeremiah, though he showed a deep and warm feeling for his nation and for his fellows, had a far deeper feeling for the sorrows of God. Those who know him most intimately tell us that in Old Testament times no man knew more deeply the sympathy of our Lord. Jeremiah wept, somewhat as Jesus wept, because men were grieving the heart of his Heavenly Father.

This prophet was likewise a priest, "not merely by birth, but by the grace of God." "He so identified himself with his people as to feel their sins and sufferings his own, and to



THE THREE SYMPATHIES.

bear them on his heart before God." This prophet and priest laid down his life, but he could not save his people from their sins and their doom. He could only foreshadow the coming of a Greater than he. Jeremiah was neglected by men, who counted him worse than a failure, who scoffed at him as a weakling, and who slew him as a pessimist. But this patriot, this seer, this saint was exalted by his God to be a type of the Saviour of the world.

Signs of NEED	*Tokens of its* PRESENCE	*Spiritual* BLESSINGS	*Alternative* CURSES
1. Ingratitude	1. Liberality	1. "Heard"	1. Failure
2. Irreverence	2. Reverence	2. "Remembered"	2. Punishment
3. Unworthy Priesthood	3. Meditation	3. "Owned"	3. Burning
4. Worldliness	4. Service	4. "Spared"	4. Defeat
5. Envy	5. Cordiality	5. "Separated"	5. Pestilence
Purely Spiritual	Purely Spiritual	Purely Spiritual	Largely Spiritual

MALACHI: AN OLD-FASHIONED REVIVAL.

IX

MALACHI: AN OLD-FASHIONED REVIVAL

"MY Messenger" is the meaning of the word Malachi. It seems to be the name of the prophet, but it may be only the general title of his message. He is known to us solely as he reveals himself in these four brief chapters, which concern others rather than himself. He seems to have been a priest, and to have written in the fifth century before Christ, after the Temple had been rebuilt, and perhaps during the interim while Nehemiah was at the Persian Court, prior to his second journey to Jerusalem. Written twenty-four hundred years ago, this book has a message for us to-day, because its central theme is revival.

Malachi was a teacher and debater, rather than a poet and orator. He had little of the impassioned feeling and the lofty utterance of earlier seers, but he was master of a style in keeping with his message, which he called a burden, meaning a heavy judgment. In de-

livering this message, he depended largely upon argument and expostulation, which aroused his hearers to interrupt him at every turn, and to challenge him to prove his assertions. But sturdy spirit that he was, he defended his position with vigour and skill. At last he convinced them that they were living in such worldliness and sin that they could not expect the blessing of Jehovah.

I. The Need for a Revival

Religious conditions in Judah after the Exile must have been a sore disappointment to Malachi, and to all others who were spiritual at heart. The Exile had been an untold blessing to the Hebrews, for in some mysterious fashion their residence in a foreign land, surrounded on every side by the most vicious paganism, had almost wholly weaned them from their old besetting sin, idolatry. But even after they had returned to their beloved land, they were far from perfect, and when their first religious zeal had abated, the teachings of the prophets began to seem like an old, old story. It is small wonder, then, that Malachi arose to point out on every hand the tokens of the need for a revival.

This prophet of old pointed out five danger

signals, which are strangely like the signs of the need for a revival in the modern world, as listed by Finney, the American evangelist: the want of brotherly love among the children of God; a worldly spirit in the Church; members falling into gross sin; the wicked triumphing over the righteous; sinners careless and unconcerned. How similar are these five danger signals of Finney to those five of Malachi! On the surface, religious conditions in the days of Finney had undergone a vast change, and largely for the better, but at heart, sin and righteousness are ever the same. Surely we, too, need a revival!

The first of these danger signals of Malachi was the spirit of ingratitude (Chap. i. 1–6). Israel had been chosen of God to be His peculiar people. They had ever been nurtured with loving care, but they had scarcely appreciated their blessings, or thanked the Heavenly Giver. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I am a Father, where is Mine honour; and if I am a Master, where is My fear?" Ingratitude! This first sin was closely bound up with the second, which was charged directly against the priests, but which was shared by the people as followers of these godless guides. This second

danger signal was the spirit of irreverence (Chap. i. 7–14).

During the Exile, many of the people must have fallen into careless ways of worship, and after their return, almost as soon as they had become accustomed to the novelty of the Temple, they were guilty of sins with scarcely a parallel in the days of their fathers. Twice the prophet charged them with saying that the table of Jehovah was contemptible,—a sentiment which to an earlier Hebrew would have been almost unthinkable. Malachi showed that his people were equally irreverent in their offerings. In olden times those who professed to obey the law brought to Jehovah the best that they had, but in the newly erected Temple Malachi saw on every hand polluted bread, as well as beasts that were lame and blind and sick. With indignation he told them that they would never think of presenting to their governor such gifts as they were bringing to their God. Irreverence!

The third danger signal was the unworthy priesthood (Chap. ii. 1–10 et al.). In these latter days of the Old Dispensation, the power of the prophets was waning, and that of the priests was growing. While Zerubbabel lived, the priesthood was somewhat worthy, but after

he was gone, the power fell into the hands of men who were not strong enough to resist their new temptations. These unworthy priests quickly made their office base and contemptible. They themselves turned aside from righteousness and truth; as blind leaders of a blind people, they caused others to stumble with them, and to fall into the ditch. Malachi told them sharply that for all this Jehovah would bring them into judgment; and then, as if to shame them for their sins, he painted in colours vivid and strong a picture of the ideal priest.

"My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him that he might fear; and he feared Me, and stood in awe of My name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips: he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and turned many away from iniquity. For the priest's lip should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts." These lofty words, and especially the closing phrase, increase our belief that the prophet himself was also a priest.

The fourth sign of the need for a revival was unfaithfulness (Chap. iii. 10–16). "Judah

hath profaned the holiness of Jehovah, which He loveth, and hath married the daughter of a foreign god." This figure is somewhat different in form from that of Hosea, but the meaning is almost the same. The people as a whole, and many of them as individuals, were untrue to Jehovah. Hence they were untrue to one another. Not content with their sins of sorcery, of perjury, and of oppression, they entered into mixed marriages, they practiced adultery and they encouraged divorce. "Jehovah hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously, though she is thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did He not make one? . . . And wherefore one? He sought a godly seed." Unfaithfulness!

The fifth sign, and far from the least, was the spirit of envy (Chaps. ii. 17 and iii. 13–15). This was almost a new note in the history of the Hebrews. In other days, when they had turned away from Jehovah, it was because they had dallied with some alien deity; but here, while professing still to serve Jehovah, they complained bitterly against His apparent favouritism to the wicked! In other portions of the Old Testament, as in the Seventy-third

Psalm, or in the Book of Ecclesiastes, a man groping his way out into the light would give utterance to such unworthy thoughts; but for the people as a whole to be moved by envy of evil-doers, and to flaunt before the world their dissatisfaction with their God, was as new as it was alarming. Those misguided folk were saying that the wicked were favoured of Jehovah, that only the doers of evil were happy, and that when the wicked fell into snares, they were delivered by the Almighty. Hence those self-styled righteous folk said that it was vain to serve God, that it profited nothing to keep His ordinances, and to walk mournfully before their God. Envy!

This picture as a whole, apart from some of its details, is strangely modern. No one of these danger signals pointed out by Malachi is missing from the modern Church; in fact, these five forms of evil, as well as those other five listed by Finney, are so prevalent to-day that it would be difficult to mention any one of them which is less prominent than the others. Ingratitude, irreverence, an unworthy priesthood, unfaithfulness, envy,—what an indictment! From which of these charges shall we try to clear ourselves? Shall it be from the sin of envy? No! We have become ac-

customed to a worldly atmosphere, which encourages us as professed children of God to covet the property of our godless neighbours, and so we can scarcely understand wherein lies our peril. But instead of pausing just now to search our hearts and our churches, to see if there be any wicked way in us, let us rather turn again to Malachi, and humbly learn from him how we can be set free from our sins.

II. The Signs of the Revival

Malachi would scarcely recognize such standardized evangelistic campaigns as we have ever with us. Across the sea they are known as "American revivals,"—a term suggestive of wide publicity, vast assemblies, thrilling sermons, fiery singing and colossal free-will offerings, carefully arranged in advance. Such revivals are doing much to restore to modern religion the old prophetic note of righteousness; but it is useless to disguise the fact that popular thinking about evangelism has drifted far from the old-fashioned simplicity of Malachi, with whom the tokens of revival were wholly spiritual. In glancing at these spiritual tokens, we may well depart from his unstudied treatment, and present them all too formally, so as to contrast with the sins to be washed away.

The first token of the presence of revival was the new spirit of liberality, which was the opposite of their former sin of ingratitude. The people appear to have ceased from their niggardliness in religion, and to have begun to bring into the storehouse the whole tithe, and only of their best. Many of us to-day see no escape from the conclusion that widespread and lasting revival can scarcely come to the Church until we accept the tithe as the minimum standard for our giving. In view of the vast need for money to carry on the work of the Kingdom, Christians in revival times could never be content with doing less than the ancient Hebrews. When all of us begin to bring the whole tithe into the Church Treasury, which corresponds to the prophet's storehouse, there will not be room in it to receive our offerings, and there will not be room in our hearts to receive the overflowing mercies of God. Liberality!

The second mark of revival was the spirit of reverence. "They feared Jehovah." Instead of the irreverence of many an American revival, with its enthusiasm uncontrolled, its methods extremely unconventional, and its appeals smacking of worldliness,—the old-fashioned revival made it easier, and not harder, to fear Jehovah. Such fear was the dominant

note of every saintly life. In the American revival there is in the heart of every sincere believer more or less of such godly fear, but as a rule it is beneath the surface. We smile in a superior sort of way when we think how the fathers and mothers prayed and sang with reverence and godly fear, but ere long we find ourselves yearning for something of the strength and the sweetness which filled their hearts. They knew so well the God of holy love, that they feared to displease Him by breaking His laws. Even in revival times, they were willing to let Him choose His spiritual methods, and prepare the way for His spiritual mercies to flow into the hearts which fear of Him had cleansed. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." If such be the slavish fear, may the tribe of slaves increase! Reverence!

The third token was meditation. "They thought on His name." In modern evangelism we are often content with absence of thought, provided we have an excess of feeling. If we ministers are too busy to prepare thoughtful messages, based on careful study of the Book, we are tempted to resort to what we style "evangelistic talks." But in the old-fashioned revival, "they thought on His name"; in Hebrew thought the name represented the

character. They thought much about God! They must have spent much time in prayerful study of the Bible, known to many of them doubtless only by memory. "O how love I Thy law; it is my meditation all the day." If we look behind the scenes of such evangelistic campaigns as those conducted by Mr. Sunday, despite all their spectacular display, culminating in the song about the brewer's big horses, we find that the mighty power of those mass meetings is due most largely to Bible study and to prayer. Proper use of these old-fashioned spiritual methods should bring a revival to any church. Meditation!

"They thought on His name," and "they served Him." In the normal life of the children of God, meditation and service are one and inseparable; the passive and the active, the contemplative and the practical, must blend. Either without the other would be almost harmful: meditation without service would soon degenerate into religious day-dreaming; and service without meditation would soon smack of materialism. But when properly fused together in the heart, these twain are almost irresistible. Spiritual meditation reveals the heavenly vision, and spiritual service "gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a

name." In revival days, men and women and children, no longer content with thinking and talking and singing about spiritual things, begin most seriously to perform every known duty, and all for the glory of God. They begin to carry their religion, with perfection as its standard, and with love divine as its motive power, into all their routine tasks and joys. Service!

The last token of the presence of revival is the most surprising. "They spake often one to another." This token may well stand last, for unless the other graces precede, cordiality means little to the Kingdom. Imagine friendliness without liberality, or reverence, or meditation, or service! But if all of these graces abound, cordiality should likewise abound. Instead of jealousy and backbiting, coldness and cliques, the children of God love all of their brethren, and show this love in their daily speech. It makes a great deal of difference what we say when we try to be cordial. We can surmise what Malachi's brethren said one to another, when their hearts were overflowing with love: they would confess their sins, and seek friendly counsel, and cheer one another along life's rough way, and speak many words of simple human fellowship. Love is rarely at a loss for

something to say. When the children of God dwell together in unity, His favour crowns the work of revival. Cordiality!

III. The Blessings of Revival

The blessings which Malachi saw in the Church, when filled with revival power, were purely spiritual. Instead of counting heads, and even dollars, as we should do, he has given us an imposing array of spiritual mercies. First of all, the prayers of God's people were heard, doubtless because those prayers were more spiritual and fervent than before. In a sense, our Heavenly Father hears all of our prayers, as well as all of our curses, but not to bless. Listen to the King in Hamlet, when he tries to pray, although he has not repented for his sin —

> "My words go up, my thoughts remain below;
> Words without thoughts never to heaven go."

In the deepest sense, such prayers are not heard; but in revival times, when we learn really to pray, all our prayers are heard, and all are answered, usually in the affirmative.

The second blessing is likewise spiritual. "A book of remembrance was written before Him

for them that feared Jehovah, and that thought upon His name." If we revere God, He remembers us! The figure here is most suggestive: in revival times, new names are written in the book of the Lord, and other names, written long since, but blotted by sin, are now made bright as new. Closely allied to this promise is another: "They shall be Mine, saith Jehovah, in the day that I make." They belong to Him, as well as to His Church, and He will keep them safe. Even in the great and terrible Day of Jehovah, that day whose coming no man can foretell, He will claim these children as eternally His own.

In the fourth place, these children of God are to be spared, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." The Old Testament is commonly supposed to represent God only as Judge and King, but here it reveals Him as at the same time the Father. He spares His children, not from burdens and trials, but doubtless from burdens too heavy and from temptations too strong. He treats them, not as pets to be pampered as playthings for an idle hour, but as children to be trained for an eternal ministry. In view of such a promise, that which follows is not strange; "Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, be-

tween him that serveth God and him that serveth not." Instead of the former coldness, when the professed children of light could scarcely mark the difference between themselves and the children of darkness, in revival days the children of God begin to lead such a shining life that they can never again ask themselves whether it pays to serve the Lord. The separated life!

IV. The Alternative to a Revival

When we turn to the closing chapter of Malachi, and read curse after curse, or ban after ban, to use the softer word, we are tempted to wish that we knew more about the revival in his day. Was it merely local and temporary? We cannot tell. We merely know that after painting the brightest picture of the blessings of revival, he painted the darkest picture of the ways in which Jehovah would punish hardened impenitence. Unless the people sought the favour of the Lord, sooner or later they would feel the weight of His hand. If they neglected their spiritual opportunities, if they did not make the most of promised mercies, if they let their blessings slip away through careless fingers, they could expect only one alternative.

The Day of Jehovah was coming. For the

righteous, it would mean blessings rich and vast; for the wicked, and especially for those who were wicked in heart, while professing to be righteous, it would mean a curse. This word curse, or ban, is the last word in the Old Testament, and in every heart it should echo its message of warning. The Hebrews, who are extremely sensitive in such matters, often transpose the last two verses of Malachi, so that their Bible may not close with a word of ill omen. They resort to a similar expedient in the books of Isaiah, of Ecclesiastes and of Lamentations; but they cannot thus easily hide from their eyes the dark truth that the alternative to a genuine revival is a fivefold curse, or ban.

The prophet's teaching here is largely figurative, but wrapped up in each figure is a great, black fact. His first picture is that of failure. "I will curse your blessings." This is a hard saying. If it be failure, as we often think, not to receive blessings, how much worse the failure when we receive blessings rich and vast, and by our sins transform them into curses! To-day, as in Judah of old, every blessing, physical or spiritual, may by our neglect become a curse. Closely allied to this teaching is that of punishment, "I will come near to

you to judgment." The prophet does not say how this judgment is to come, or when; he lays his whole stress upon the central truth that doom will fall upon all who fear not Jehovah.

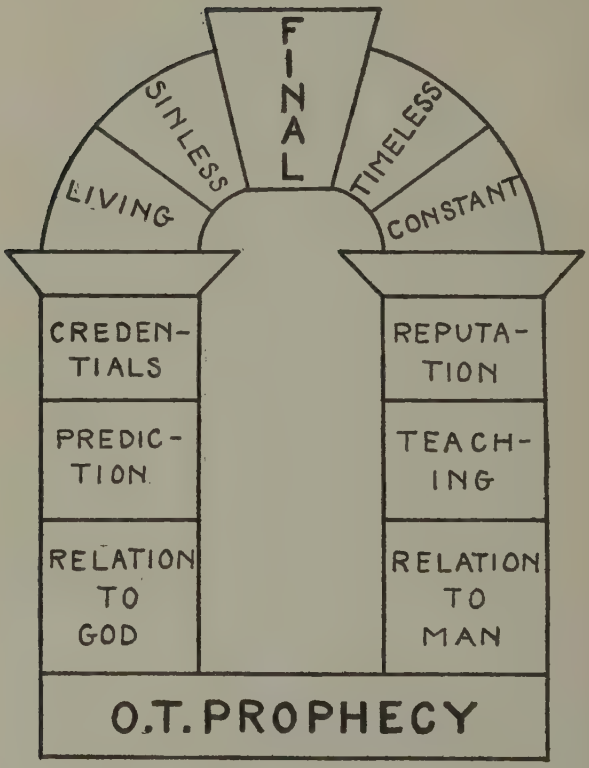
The third picture is that of burning. Malachi employs this figure to portray both the blessing of the righteous, and the doom of the wicked. In the refiner's flame, the righteous are to be tried, and from it they are to emerge as pure silver; but for the wicked, this same burning is to be a consuming fire. They are to be as stubble which cannot withstand the heat, and as a tree whose root and branch are to be consumed. Once more, the form of the truth changes to that of defeat. The counsels of the wicked are not forever to flourish; at the hands of the righteous they are to suffer a decisive defeat. The schemes on which they pride themselves are to be reversed, and all their proud hopes are to be blasted.

The scene shifts for the last time, and reveals the pestilence, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." What a picture of the Holy Land to-day, which once flowed with milk and honey! The hearts of the people did not turn towards the God of righteousness; and so their fate was the pestilence, which stalks through the land, leaving everywhere a

trail of death. Such is the last of Malachi's pictures of the doom which will fall upon us if we do not accept the blessings of spiritual revival. As our mercies are more rich and vast than those of Judah, so will our doom be more awful, unless we repent.

V. The Hope for a Revival To-day

We ought to rejoice because the true revival is wholly spiritual. If it depended upon mere money, upon executive ability, upon numbers, or upon anything worldly or material, many of us might well despair of having a revival in our churches. The Lord will bless the means which He has put into our hands, for He wishes us to serve Him with our best; but if we are without the instruments which appear to the modern world to be indispensable, we must still trust Him to open the windows of heaven and pour out the blessing. A genuine revival among the children of God should be possible at any time and at any place. It should be possible for you, just where you are, and just now. Malachi has shown us our need, and he has shown us the certainty of spiritual supply for all our spiritual needs. "Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings."



JESUS CHRIST: THE MATCHLESS PROPHET.

X

JESUS CHRIST: THE MATCHLESS PROPHET

A CLOSER acquaintance with the prophets of the Old Testament should increase our knowledge of Jesus Christ, for He was a Prophet. To speak more correctly, He was and is the only Prophet, Whom Isaiah and all of those other worthies resembled, so far as they were true to the prophetic ideal. In their loftiest messages they foretold His coming, and in their lives they foreshadowed His character. Passing by for the nonce the fact that He was more than this, almost infinitely more, let us state our reasons for speaking of Him as a Prophet.

I. The Old Testament Basis

Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament predictions concerning the Messiah. This fact shines from many a page of the New Testament, and especially when it quotes from the Old, as in the Gospel according to Matthew, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "God,

having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." As Dr. W. J. Beecher has shown us, Old Testament predictions concerning the Messiah as Prophet are many and various. Two examples will serve, either of which would repay extended study.

In Deuteronomy xviii. 15, Moses gives the people from whom he is soon to depart this comforting promise: "Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken." Still more significant are the familiar words from Isaiah lxi. 1–4, as quoted by the Master in the synagogue at Nazareth. If we are to give these words their due weight, we must remember that they were written by a prophet, in foretelling the work of the coming Messiah, and that they were definitely appropriated to Himself by the Master, when He said, "To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears."

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He hath anointed Me to preach
good tidings to the poor;
He hath sent Me to proclaim release to the
captives,

And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

The Master's life on earth was largely that of a prophet. He was reared in much the same sort of way as many of the Old Testament seers; He entered His public ministry only after a vision which set Him apart from His fellows; He spent His days and His nights as a herald of righteousness; because He was true to God, He was persecuted for righteousness' sake; and at last He was slain. This parallel might be extended still further, but only with extreme caution, for there are many respects in which the Son of God was unlike other prophets.

The largeness of this resemblance should be clear from a glance at the titles used in describing the prophets. How many of these would not fitly apply to the Master? Was He not a "prophet," in the sense of the original word, which means a speaker forth for God, a "seer," a "man of God," a "servant of Jehovah," a "man of the Spirit," a "messenger of Jehovah," an "ambassador," a "watchman"? Yes! He was worthy to bear all of these titles, and others so lofty that no mortal could bear them.

II. His Claims and His Credentials

Jesus Christ claimed to be a Prophet, and for the children of God such a claim from Him is final. We can only ask what He meant, and yearn to live in the light which He revealed. At the very beginning of His ministry, as we have seen, before He had begun to lay stress upon the fact that He was Priest or King, He introduced Himself as the Prophet. From time to time during the course of His public ministry, He called attention to this same fact; and as the end drew near, this early truth kept its place in His teaching, side by side with other truth which does not concern us here. For example, in speaking of His own death He said, "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." His claim appears, not so much from such proof-texts, as from the tenor of His entire teaching, especially as voiced in the Gospel according to John.

In support of this claim, the Master early in His public ministry began to display to the world such credentials as all the Old Testament prophets together could not have produced. He performed miracles, not only that He might relieve distress and illustrate His teaching, but primarily that He might prove to the world that He came from God. In His

teaching He so impressed His hearers that they cried out: "Never man so spake!" In His predictions, too, He rested His claim upon His power to read and to interpret the future, both near and remote. Some of these predictions, needless to say, were fulfilled while He was on earth; others, after He ascended into glory; and many yet await His pleasure. What more could He have said or done to show that He was a prophet?

So convincing were these credentials that even the enemies of Jesus called Him a prophet. This claim was perhaps the only one which was accepted by the people of His time. Of course they did not mean by the term all that He meant by it, but they often spoke of Him as a prophet. This reputation followed Him throughout His ministry. When He first became known, He seemed to King Herod to be John the Baptist, risen from the dead; to others at that time, Elijah; and to others still, one of the prophets. Later in His ministry, "He asked the disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that the Son of Man is,' and they said, 'Some say, John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'" On the eve of His death, "when He was come unto Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, say-

ing, 'Who is this?' and the multitude said, 'This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.'"

Such tributes gain their importance from the fact that they were always accepted by the Master; and that they were welcomed whenever they were genuine, as from the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. It is interesting to note that the Koran, in two different passages, speaks of Christ as a prophet, "but only a prophet;" and that the Christian Church in all ages has hailed Him as a prophet, and more than a prophet. The Shorter Catechism, for example, reflects the thinking of the orthodox Church: "Christ as our Redeemer executeth the offices of a Prophet, of a Priest and of a King, both in His estate of humiliation and of exaltation." In view of these facts, it is surprising to hear such a scholar as Professor James Denney, of Glasgow, insisting that Jesus was not a prophet!

III. His Relation to God and to the People

The heart of the prophetic office, as we have seen elsewhere, was dependence upon God, and in no other was this so absolute as in the relation of Jesus Christ to His Heavenly Father. Such dependence appeared when Jesus was a

boy in the Temple; and after He began His public ministry, it breathed through every word which fell from His lips, it shone through every deed wrought by His loving hands. Think of His baptism, of His temptation, of His daily life, of His miracles, of His teachings, and of His death! What is the key-note of it all? "I must do the works of Him that sent Me." "Not My will, but Thine be done." Such passages abound in the Gospel according to John, and while they show far more than this, they show us now that Christ bore to God the ideal prophetic relation of absolute dependence.

Christ as a prophet was in the noblest sense independent of the people. This truth, also, has another side, equally winsome, but that does not concern us here. He was no whit subservient to the people,—in order to gain a livelihood, to enhance His reputation, to establish Himself as a popular leader, or for any other reason. To speak of such baseness in the same breath with His holy name is almost sacrilege, but we must so speak, in order to show in part why He shared the prophet's reward. "So persecuted they the prophets that were before you." "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem!"

IV. His Twofold Message

The message of Jesus Christ to the world was that of a prophet; and so it assumed two forms, closely blended, which we shall style loosely the non-predictive and the predictive, to correspond with the Law and the Promise in the Old Testament prophets. Of these two elements, the larger in bulk, in His teaching as in theirs, was the non-predictive. The religious world to-day, as we have seen, is divided somewhat sharply into two great schools, one of which lays more stress upon the predictive element of prophecy, whereas the other school lays more stress upon the non-predictive element; and nowhere does this difference in emphasis appear more strongly than in dealing with the teachings of Christ. But, fortunately, all evangelical students of the Book recognize the presence of each element, and at least something of its importance.

The non-predictive teaching of the Master, as in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, consists of spiritual principles clearly explained, largely by illustrations from surrounding life; and not of mere religious rules to be applied universally, regardless of circumstances. As a prophet the Master was a teacher sent from God to His own age, first of all, and so He

spake in terms which they could understand. But He is the prophet for our age, also, as well as for every other, and not the least astounding of His numberless powers is the way in which His teaching meets the needs of every age.

The teaching of the Master concerns those same truths which we have seen unfolded and enforced by the old-time seers: truths about God and man, about righteousness and salvation, about sin and redemption. It would be difficult to name any great truth in the Master's teaching which had not been presented, at least in dimmest outline, by the Old Testament prophets; but it would be equally difficult to mention any such age-long truth upon which He did not throw a new and radiant light. Think, for example, of His teachings about immortality. As we shall see, He not only spoke in its final form the truth which the prophets had spoken through His Holy Spirit, but He Himself was the incarnation of that truth, and so He is to-day. "I am . . . the truth."

This teaching falls naturally into various groups, and it would be interesting to classify religious thinkers according as they emphasize most strongly what the Master reveals about God,—such as His holiness or His Fatherhood;

about His own Person,—such as His divinity or His incarnation; about His work,—such as the atonement or the kingdom; or about His corresponding relation to us,—such as Saviour or Master. The teaching of Jesus, with all of its many forms, was at heart ever one; and so it should be possible for us to learn from His life and His words the central truth of the Christian religion. Personally, I believe this to be the truth about God, as revealed most fully in the Christ of the Cross, and as made known in our hearts by the Spirit of the living Christ.

The God Whom Jesus revealed, both in His character and by His words, is the same God revealed by the prophets, the God of righteousness and of love; but Christ as our Prophet revealed God in such a vastly higher way that He seemed to the world to be almost a new God. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Under this first great principle of a personal God, revealed in His only-begotten Son, for the salvation of a world lost in sin,—one may well group all the teachings of our Prophet.

The teachings of Christ, simple as they at first appear, comprise a vast world of truth.

They reveal much about the kingdom of God, and about the worth of the individual soul; about the faith which links the souls of men to the grace of God, and about the love which binds the children of God to their brethren on earth. Love is the fulfilling of the law, which is never for an instant relaxed. The standard for our life on earth is nothing short of perfection, the motive for such lofty spiritual ambition is the love of God, and the power enabling us to grow towards our ideal is the Spirit of the indwelling Christ. "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Surely such a teacher was "a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people."

The teachings of Jesus Christ include a fairly large body of predictions, both general and specific. For example, there are predictions touching the progress of the kingdom on earth, especially as it concerns Jerusalem, and its ultimate consummation in heaven. There are predictions, too, concerning Jesus Himself, and especially concerning His death on the cross, His resurrection and His second coming. These predictions, and others like them, comprise a fairly large portion of His words while He walked among men, and they fill the larger

portion of the last book of the Bible, spoken by the Ascended Lord. It should be evident, therefore, that He was, and is, and ever shall be, the Prophet.

V. Vastly More Than a Prophet

In view of these facts, which we have hastily reviewed, facts showing that Jesus met every test of a prophet, why should such a scholar as Professor Denney refuse to employ this title in speaking of the Master? Ah; it is because Jesus Christ is more than a prophet. What men of the olden time knew by revelation, and spake by inspiration, Jesus Christ was and is in Himself. In a sense which does not begin to be true of any other, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." All of this is most gloriously true, and if it were not true, it would avail us little to hear the words of Jesus as Prophet. Let us therefore glance at some of the respects in which He differs from the prophets of the Old Testament.

Jesus Christ is the final Prophet. He alone could say, "If it were not so, I would have told you." Those who went before, from Moses to John the Baptist, prepared the way for Him, and those who have come after, from John and Paul to Spurgeon and Moody, have only fol-

lowed the guidance of His Spirit in unfolding the truth as it was revealed in Him. "God having of old time spoken unto the fathers by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." Jesus Christ is God's last word to the world: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."

Our Prophet was sinless. Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves; Isaiah confessed that he was a man of unclean lips; but Jesus Christ could say, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" Therefore He was able to reveal the will of God concerning sin in a way which these others could only approach. Any reader who wishes to follow out this line of thought should turn to Ullmann's masterly little book, "The Sinlessness of Jesus," or to Gore's "Brampton Lectures on the Incarnation."

The sinless Son of God was the living Prophet. Other men by the Spirit learned the will of God, and so they were glad to be counted worthy to die for the truth, but He alone could say, "I am the truth." "The difference between 'I know' and 'I am' is the difference between the prophet and the Saviour." Men like Jeremiah, it is true, were

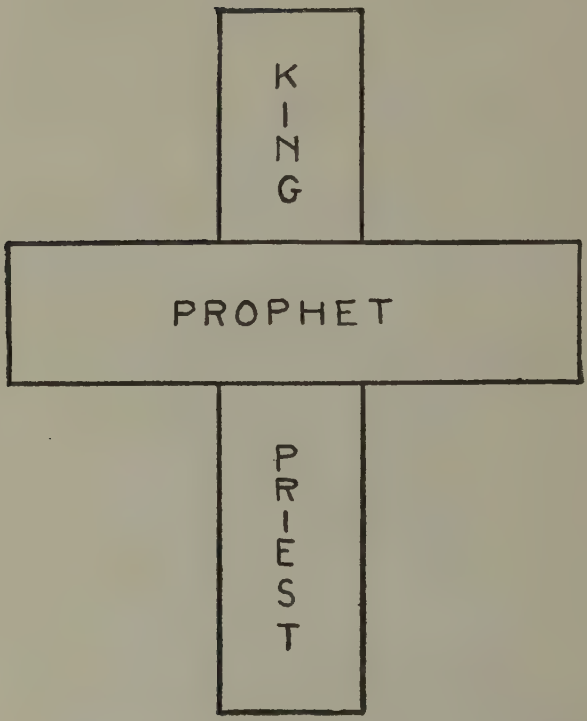
in heart and in life so much like the coming Redeemer, that we do well to think of them, as well as of their words, as messages from God, but in a sense vastly higher than this, Jesus Christ is the Truth. He alone is the Word.

The message of this sinless, living Prophet was constant. In others the prophetic gift ebbed and flowed, and the inspired record carefully points out that apart from the special guidance and restraint of the Spirit, they were fallible: Samuel thought at first that Eliab should be King; and Nathan took to King David a message which quickly proved not to be from the Lord. How different the prophetic powers and the prophetic ministry of Him Who was always the Word!

He alone was the timeless prophet. Other men were peculiarly the prophets of their own times, and while they have a vital message for us to-day, and for every age, they must ever stand before the world as ancient Hebrews. But Jesus Christ as a Prophet is the same to us in America to-day as to the two disciples whose hearts burned within them as He opened to them the Scriptures concerning Himself. To-morrow and always, here and everywhere, on earth and in heaven, He shall be ever the

same, the timeless Prophet, because the eternal Son of God.

Yes, Jesus Christ is our Prophet. It is well for us to think of the many respects in which the mightiest men of the Old Testament were like Him. It is even better to think of the many, many respects in which they were almost infinitely less than He. It is best of all to know that He is vastly more than our Prophet. He is also our Priest and our King. Yes! He is our Saviour, our Master, our God! As we close this series of popular studies on the prophets, culminating in a distant view of the Matchless Prophet, let us hear the voice of the Heavenly Father, saying to us, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." Then we shall see no man, but Jesus only.



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